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VITTHAL RAMJI SHINDE

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1

INTRODUCTION

Vitthal Ramji, alias Annasaheb, well known for his generous, self abnegating personality and missionary spirit, may aptly be described as a modern sage. His significant contribution to the social, political, academic and cultural life of Maharashtra spans the first three decades of the twentieth century. It would be rare to find, in the annals of history of Maharashtra at least, another instance of so well-educated a person who had renounced every kind of comfort to attain his spiritual and social goals. At a time when the society did not even remotely consider untouchability as a disgrace to humanity, he undertook to eradicate untouchability on a national scale. This work, for which he devoted all his life, has a great historical significance. His commitment to this cause, his indefatigable efforts towards the eradication of untouchability and his tremendous sacrifice earned him the titles, "Karmaveer" and "Maharshi."

Maharshi Shinde was, essentially, a spiritual person. He spent his whole life in disseminating the liberal Brahmo philosophy among the common people. Similarly, his work of eradication of untouchability had originated from his deeply religious nature. And this same religious nature served as the foundation for all the other social and political work which he undertook, apart from eradication of untouchability. His social work includes his efforts to stop the custom of offering girls to God as Muralis and to make compulsory primary education available to girls along with boys. He was also interested in the upliftment of peasants lives. He participated in politics by founding the Bahujan Paksha which espoused the cause of the downtrodden and the oppressed in the society. He became the follower of Mahatma Gandhi and worked among the peasants and also suffered imprisonment in 1930 for participating in the Salt Satyagraha. His research work, too, is quite significant. He was the first person to conduct methodical research into the origin and problems of untouchability in India. Along with this sociological research, his comparative linguistic studies of Kannada and Marathi as well as of Konkani and Marathi are also significant. His multi-dimensional work is an expression of his rich and multi-faceted personality.

There is a thread running common through all his work. Whatever he undertook, be it social problems or politics, he always strove for unity and integrity. Just as he never indulged in divisive practices for easy and instant gains, either in politics or in social work, he never indulged in such modes of thinking for the sake of cheap popularity. He worked throughout his life for the unification of the so-called higher castes and the lower untouchable communities. He strove hard for bringing the Maratha community into the main stream of national struggle. Whether it be two cultures or two castes, two regions or two sects, or two languages what he perceived in them was unity rather than discord. That was more important to him.

The next few chapters attempt to trace the development of the character and personality of Annasaheb Shinde from his childhood and seek to explore the relationship between his life and his work.

2

CHILDHOOD, EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Vitthal Ramji, alias Annasaheb Shinde, was born on 23 April, 1873, in a respectable Maratha family in Jamkhandi, (then a princely state, now in Karnataka), a city where both Marathi and Kannada cultures blended perfectly. Vitthal Ramji's paternal grandparents were Baswantrao and Santabai, popularly called Basappa and Sattyavva in this Kannada speaking township. Financially it was a well-to-do family. The grandfather was a typical Maratha whereas the grandmother had all the qualities of a typical Kannadiga. He was urbanized, familiar with courtly manners and suave, whereas she was from a Kunbi[1] family, somewhat rustic and coarse. Religious by nature, she was a follower of the goddess Yallamma. Vitthal Ramji's maternal grandmother, on the other hand, was not religious in the same way as Sattyavva, yet she was the embodiment of the true religious spirit. Her appearance was like a Vaishnava brahmin woman but she had none of the superficiality and superstitions of established religion. According to Annasaheb, his mother had inherited all these qualities from her mother.

Annasaheb's parents were Ramji and Yamunabai, daughter of Shri Krishnarao Kale of Algur, near Jamkhandi. Ramjibaba received the training of accounts and book keeping. He worked as a teacher for some time and later as a senior officer in the clerical profession at Jamkhandi.

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[1] Kunbi : a farmer caste, considered to be a subgroup of the Maratha caste.

Vitthal Ramji had one elder brother Parshuram and a younger sister, Janakka. All of them were married off, according to the custom of that time, at a young age, in 1882. Vitthal Ramji was married to Rukmini, daughter of his paternal aunt. Unfortunately, his elder brother died in 1885 and from then on, Annasaheb had to shoulder all the responsibilities as the elder son. As a result, the ebullient spirit of his tender age was transformed into a grave demeanour. By this time, his family was in acute financial crisis as his father had resigned from the job he was holding at the princely state. Vitthal Ramji, who had experienced the comforts of financial security before, began to suffer the pangs of poverty now. Yet because of the peaceful and happy atmosphere in his house, this did not greatly affect him. His days at school were pleasant. He had such renowned teachers as Shri Tryambakrao Khandekar, Vasudeorao Chirmule, Ganesh Shastri Joshi, and Appasaheb Kale. He was interested in science subjects as well as in languages —Sanskrit, English and Marathi. He was basically an aesthete, naturally inclined towards appreciation of beauty in literature. Commenting upon his aesthetic inclinations, he said,

> "Just as there was no caste discrimination at home, there was no cultural barrier in my heart. I have always been ready to receive beauty with open arms wherever I have found it. It may be native or English, urban or rural, elite or proletarian, it makes no difference to me. It has to be natural, that's all!"

Vitthal Ramji's father was well versed in subjects such as *Dharamshastra, Jotish* etc. He has also studied Marathi *pothyas*, i.e. handwritten treatises. Though brahminical in his living style, he had friends among all sections in the society. Pious by nature, he was attracted towards the Warkari sect of Pandharpur and joined their pilgrimages every year. He took a leading role in organizing devotional programmes during the holy week from Tukaram Beej[2] onwards, in the Vithoba Math at Jamkhandi.

The lifestyle of the Shinde household was noble and refined. This character never changed even in the face of abject poverty. Annasaheb has traced the roots of his social reform movement to his father's faith in the Bhagawata Dharma and his parents' piety.

The world is a reincarnation of Vishnu
Discrimination, an erroneous conception, unholy
The secret of God's worship
Lies in not envying anybody.

This abhanga[3] made a deep impression on his mind and laid a sound foundation for his future work. Not even the Brahmo Samaj, he confessed, had anything more to contribute to this basic foundation later on.

Vitthal Ramji's household didn't observe any 'parda'[4] system, nor did they believe in it because there was no place in their heart for concealment and discrimination. Women and men, adults and children, used to mix freely with each other and among the family friends with equal candour. As they didn't believe in the caste system, they did not have to begin by breaking it at home like other religious reformists. Even brahmins and lingayatas, who, otherwise, never ate food with Marathas, did not have any qualms in sharing food at their place. Truely, it was a universal family. All were welcome to eat together, including barbers, washermen, and Muslims. No disasters like family problems, poverty, illnesses, deaths or debts could

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[2] Tukaram Beej : 17 Falgun. The day on which Tukaram, the great Marathi saint of the 17th century, is supposed to have been bodily taken to Vaikuntha, Lord Vishnu's abode. The day is celebrated all over Maharashtra, especially by the warkari sect.

[3] Abhaga : Traditional poetic form of writing, employed extensively by saints.

[4] Parda : The custom of wearing a parda, 'veil' by women so that they could not be seen by others, particularly other men. Indicates the influence of Muslim rulers.

ever disturb the peace of this household. Principles of social reform were followed as a natural way of life and the secret lay in the balance achieved between equality and freedom, generosity and self respect. All those who had discarded vanity and who treated others with equal respect and love used to receive the same treatment from the family.

Annasaheb opined that it is genuine sympathy more than pure rationalism that serves as the right foundation of social reform movements. It was precisely this principle that characterized the behaviour of his family members at home.

Annasaheb's mother holds a prominent place in the development of his mind. She used to sing Kannada songs on Gopikrishna in her sonorous voice. She had to suffer both ill-treatment at the hands of her mother-in-law and acute anguish of poverty. Yet she never uttered a word of complaint. She never let her peace of mind, her cheerful disposition and her aesthetic sense be disturbed by these tensions. Several pregnancies, illnesses and untimely deaths of her children finally took their toll on her and her physical strength diminished considerably but not a word of complaint escaped her lips. Nor did she despise her family. On the contrary, she used to amuse her children with several anecdotes from her life. Annasaheb says :

> "Her contentment was like a potent medicine for me in my childhood and the source of inexhaustible treasure for me."

Women hold an important place in the spiritual and social thought and achievements of Annasaheb. His love for his mother was the fountainhead of his chivalrous spirit towards women. He used to claim that it was to his mother that he had surrendered his heart to first and then to Nature.

The township of Jamkhandi was located in the heart of three picturesque hills. Very often, at the end of the rainy season, his father used to take them all on picnics to beautiful scenic spots in the hills. Annasaheb's love for Nature was inspired probably by his father's fondness for Nature. Annasheb often visited places of scenic splendour alone and with friends.

Annasaheb received his training upto matriculation at Jamkhandi. His talent was noticed in the English high school where he became keenly interested in English, Sanskrit and Marathi. He became acquainted with English and Sanskrit literature at school whereas his own house had several means to make him fall in love with Marathi literature. His father was a voracious reader, with writings of Shridhar, Mahipati, Tukarama, and Dhyaneshwar finding place in the bookshelves. Young Vithu, while in the fifth standard, used to read works like *Ramavijaya, Harivijaya*[5] and explain them to his friends. He was good in all subjects, more, according to him, because of his interest rather than his intelligence. And the credit for that goes to his parents rather than to his teachers. Yet he was a favourite student of his teachers like Shri Chirmule, Shri Khandekar. He passed his matriculation with good marks.

Jamkhandi represented a rich amalgamation of Kannada and Marathi cultures, where both Marathi and Kannada languages were used. Deities worshipped also were from both cultures. Several factors, such as the aristocratic Marathi culture at home and the brahminical culture outside, the liberal religiosity of the Warkari sect followed by his father, the free entry to his house for people of all castes and sections of society, the kind, gentle and sensitive nature of his mother and the beautiful scenic Nature around, made a deep and lasting impact on his impressionable, receptive young mind. It endowed him with a strong spiritualistic foundation and a generous, liberal point of view. The composite culture in which he grew up, inculcated in his mind a deep faith in the bonds of unity among people. As a result, he grew up to be a sensitive and perceptive young man with a fine aesthetic sensibility.

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[5] Ramavijaya, Harivijaya : Old Marathi works, which retold the tales of Rama and Krishna.

He worked as a teacher at Jamkhandi for some time, but soon, on the advise of his teacher Shri Chirmule, gave up the job in order to go to Pune for his college education in 1893. His financial condition was far from satisfactory. His family had now lost whatever little financial security they had in his childhood. He had to take the support, first, of the scholarship offered by the Deccan Maratha Education Association and later, of the scholarship offered by His Royal Highness Sayajirao Gaikwad. He spent six years in Pune from 1893 to 1898 in Fergusson college where he completed his B.A. and first year of L.L.B. During this period, he got friends like Shri Vishnupant Deshpande of Terdal, Govindrao Sasne from Kolhapur and Shri J.S. Karandikar from Wai whose friendship remained a lifelong bond of love.

The years he spent in Pune were crucial in terms of their contribution to the development and expression of his personality, and the direction they gave to his future life.

But at the same time, they also represent a turbulent phase in terms of the agitation caused in his mind by familial, psychological and spiritual anxieties.

He was used to poverty even in his home at Jamkhandi but there it never had been unbearable because of the gentle and affectionate atmosphere at home. He began to feel very lonely in Pune. He found the college environment quite stiffling. He could not concentrate on his coursework. The straitened means at home were a constant cause of worry. His sister Janabai had to be brought back home because of her in-law's ill treatment of her. He had to now maintain two people on his scholarship. In 1896 he brought his wife for education to Pune, along with his mother. He started giving tutions so as to make ends meet.

He failed in his intermediate examination in 1894 and B.A in 1897 but he never lost his hope. He felt that our examination system was terribly oppressive as it treated students like race horses. He had, of course, enough self-confidence not to be cowed down by these failures.

He used to keep a diary during his Fergusson days in 1897. This diary is quite significant as it reflects the development of his personality and also reflects a mature individuality which had already been shaped. During this period, he read extensively, attended public speeches in the college and outside, particularly those in the Vasant Vyakhyanmala[6] and perused newspapers. like *Kal* and *Kesari*. His critique of all of these demonstrates his distinctive vision, his keen sense of humour, his sharp observation and maturity of his mind.

During this period, he was tremendously attracted towards religion. At the same time, he was very much interested in social issues. He regretted the fact that the Bahujan Samaj got little focus in the social events, public speeches and newspapers. He wanted public speakers to disseminate new scientific knowledge amongst the common people rather than churning out the same facts known to all. He was dissatisfied that there wasn't a single journal devoted to religion. This dissatisfaction is reflected in the following comment he made :

> "These days one finds so much rubbish dumped in the form of newspapers yet it is difficult to find even a single thing about religion in it."

He sincerely felt that there was a great need to disperse the religious philosophy of Prarthana Samaj among the rural, illiterate folks. He revered people like

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[6] Vasant Vyakhyan Mala : Literally, a garland of lectures in Spring, 'Vasanta', which comes generally in the month of May. It was cultural practice in Maharashtra to organize public lectures by renowned scholars which were very well attended.

Shri Kalaskar who worked among the Mahars and Mangs and often regretted the fact that he hadn't undertaken any such work. He discussed the possibility of forming a group devoted to such work with his friends such as Govindrao Sasne, Madhvrao Hulyal, Keshavrao Kanitkar. In short, he was acutely interested in both religious and social issues.

He had been already exposed to agnostic and reformist opinions, while in Jamkhandi through the newspaper *Sudharak* (The Reformist) edited by Agarkar. He was excited by the articles in it on freedom of thought, freedom of speech and women's emancipation. He used to give public speeches on these issues in the Vasant Vyakyanamala, expressing views based on these articles. When he was in the first year in the Fergusson college, he read several books by John Stuart Mill— *Liberty, Utilitarianism* and *Subjection of Women* and was tremendously impressed by them. He had also studied Spencer's works like *Education* and *Introduction to the Study of Society* etc. This was a period when Spencer's agnostic philosophy had made inroads not only in Europe but also in distant eastern lands like Hindustan and Japan. Educated young men were thrilled to the core by this philosophy. Annasaheb, too, was no exception. He, too, came under the spell of the materialistic, agnostic philosophy of Mill and Spencer in the initial stage. He even organized a discussion group, when he was staying in Kelkar Wada, where he used to argue in favour of Mill and Spenser. This was the agnostic phase in his life. Yet his mind was basically nurtured by the pure spiritualism of the Warkari sect. And Mill and Spencer were unable to satisfy the acute hunger of his soul.

In 1895, he was exposed for the first time to the principles of Unitarian philosophy through Rev. J T Sunderland, representative of the American Unitarian Association. He was impressed by the priest's reverberating speech in the convention of the Rashtriya Sabha, The National Congress.

He met Rev. Sunderland personally to discuss his views with him. He started to read several pamphlets on Unitarianism. Around the same time, he was also reading the extensive lectures of Prof Max Muller on religion which appealed to him greatly. He began to feel a great affinity toward Prof Max Muller. As a result of all these developments, he was attracted towards the Prarthana Samaj.

He started visiting the Prarthana Samaj regularly from 1898 onwards. He was impressed by the prayers and discourses of Rao Bahadur Shri K B Marathe. He soon cultivated an association with senior people such as Shri Ganapat Bhaskar Kotkar and Shri Shivrampant Gokhale, the missionary of the Samaj. He also came into contact with people like Justice Ranade and Dr Bhandarkar. He reminiscences :

> "All these veterans absolutely captivated me! They freed me from the obstinacy of youth, unruly thoughts and raw experiences and brought me into the mainstream of pure, benevolent religion."

On 29 May, 1898, he attended the devotional prayer session of the Prarthana Samaj in Pune. His sister Janabai had also come to attend this programme with one of her friends. Both of them were attracted towards the Samaj. They spent the day in the Prarthana Samaj. He was heartened by what he witnessed throughout the day. He realized that the Prarthana Samaj was not just a Sunday gathering. It was, as he experienced, a genuine family of the sons and daughters of God. He began to visit the Samaj and its members frequently. He came across the biography of Keshab Chandra Sen written by Pratap Chandra Muzumdar which kindled in him a strong urge to devote his whole life to the work of Prarthana Samaj, instead of remaining just a member. As a result, he was formally inducted into the Prarthana Samaj in 1898. Along with him, several other young people like Shri Motibulasa, Devdatta, (the younger son of Dr Bhandarkar), Dr Vasudev Ananta Sukhthankar also took the *Deeksha*.[7]

He passed his B.A. examination in 1898 and then went to Bombay for the next two years to keep terms for L.L.B. Here he got to know Prarthana Samajists like Shri B B Korgaonkar, D G Vaidya, Vaman Sadashiv Sohoni. During this period, he started conducting the service in Pune and Bombay centres.

During this period, whenever he went to Jamkhandi on vacations, he began to organize the Service at his home on Sundays which outsiders also attended. Even his father began to feel that the Prarthana Samaj was nothing but an extension of Bhagawat Dharma.

The year 1899 witnessed an event which gave a definite direction to Annasaheb's life. Shri Motibulasa, who had been awarded a scholarship by the British and Foreign Association in England for a comparative study of religion and who was on his way to England, unfortunately died during his journey at Port Said, due to an attack of high fever. All the members of the Samaj were shocked and grieved over his untimely death. Dr Bhandarkar organized a special memorial service for Motibulasa at Pune. Absolutely overcome with grief, Vitthal Ramji approached Dr Bhandarkar and said,

> "If you consider me eligible for the place of Shri Motibulasa, fallen vacant on account of his death, I am prepared to take his place and go to England."

Dr Bhandarkar was pleased to hear this proposal.

But this resolution was not an ordinary, casual decision. The journey was not meant to be a pleasure trip. The conditions of the award were tough. The selected student was offered a grant of just 100 pounds per year towards his maintainance which he would receive for two years. The cost of the journey had to be borne by the student himself. On his return, he was expected to devote his whole life for dissemination of the Brahmo Philosophy. In case he was unable to do so, he was expected at least not to undertake anything which would go contrary to the principles of the Brahmo Samaj.

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[7] Deeksha : the initiation ceremony, in which a new comer is initiated into the faith.

Vitthal Ramji's father had nurtured high hopes for his B.A., L.L.B. son. He was expecting his son to get a decent, well-paid job, at some princely state like Baroda, which would replace their poverty with some prosperity at last. Annasaheb had to dash these hopes of his father in undertaking the journey to England to study religion, with a promise to live an ascetic life after his return to India. But his religious convictions were too strong to be dampened by such considerations. He made up his mind. He again went to see His Royal Highness Shri Sayajirao Gaikwad and requested him for an additional loan of Rs. 1500/- for his journey. Sayajirao consented and sanctioned him the loan. Vitthal Ramji made preparations and after bidding farewell to all his teachers, family members and friends, embarked upon his voyage on 21 September, 1901, on the boat "Persia", to go to the Manchester College, Oxford, for religious training.

3

RELIGIOUS TRAINING & RELIGIOUS WORK

V R Shinde entered the Manchester College of the Unitarian Sect on 11 October, 1901. This sect is somewhat similar to the Brahmo or Prarthana Samaj in India. Just as these liberal sects have developed out of the Hindu religion and disseminated liberal, monotheist religious thought amongst people, the Unitarian sect is an offshoot of Christianity. But it does not believe, like the orthodox Christian view, in the Holy Trinity of God, his son and Holy Ghost. Rather, it considers God as one and treats Jesus Christ not as the Divine son of God but rather as a holy and yet a very human saint. Both the European and the Indian monotheist religious sects carry out their work in a way consistent with modern science, philosophy and thought.

The Manchester College was a remarkable institution founded by the people of the Unitarian sect, for systematically training missionaries. But it was not too dogmatic with respect to the religious ideology. The motto of the college was : "Devoted to the Pursuit of Truth, Liberty & Religion." The college strove to inspire the intellect of the learners and free their religious opinions from the stranglehold of rigid dogmas. Though the teachers generally had a modern outlook, it was not uncommon to find some teachers who subscribed to traditional views. When V R Shinde enrolled his name into this college, he had opportunity to learn from stalwarts like Prof Apton, who taught philosophy, Prof. Augers who was an expert on Christian Mission and Prof. Jacks on Sociology. Principal Drummond taught the Bible and the Religious Science. Shinde's favourite teacher, however, was, Prof. Carpenter, with whom he studied comparative religion, Pali language and Buddhism. All of these teachers were established and great scholars in their own field. They also had a very benign and clement nature. They often used to invite students for high tea, and also as guests to stay with them during vacations. The teachers and students constituted a large family.

During these two years, Shinde studied religion deeply. At the same time he also read English literature extensively. There were three discussion groups in the Manchester College called the Martineau Club, Discussion Club and Pause Club. He was a member of all the three. That he regularly attended their meetings and participated in the debates is evident from the minutes of these clubs. In the meeting of the Pause Club on 6 February, 1903 Shinde presented the following resolution for debate : "This meeting holds that religious work will be more effectively done if women participate more in religious work." It was passed with 11 votes in favour and 7 against.

Shinde had not gone to England to receive only theoretical training in religion. His most important, but not the sole objective,was to be a capable missionary and sharpen his religious perception. It also seems that he was preparing himself for a future life of service to the poor and downtrodden. The college provided him with training in the dissemination of religious thought and organization of prayer sessions for proselytizing activities. Apart from these, he also used to attend various services organized by the Unitarian, Catholic, Protestants and Episcopal churches. During vacation, he even used to be invited to run these sessions in the various churches. One report from a newspaper, 'The Bridport News' clearly reflects how efficiently he organized the service and how forthrightly he expostulated his religious opinions.

He also attended the Keswick convention which aimed at developing religious sense among common people. He also paid a visit to Ms Taggert and Ms Hill, President and Secretary respectively, of the Postal Mission to discuss their work with them. Similarly he met Mr Davis, editor of the daily 'Inquirer', Rev Bowie, the Unitarian secretary, Chairman Prichard of the Sunday School Association and held extensive discussions with them.

He was keenly interested in understanding the various methods used by these different missions who worked amongst the poor. He visited one such locality with Rev. Summers of the Domestic Mission and prayed for the poor women there. He studied the method of work followed by the Domestic Mission when he visited poor localities in Machester with Rev. Bishop. While observing these practical sessions, he was probably resolving to do similar work in India on his return.

Annasaheb was a very conscientious young man; similarly he had an undying zest for knowledge and beauty. That is why he managed to read as much of English literature as he could during the brief span of two years in England. He enjoyed trips to beautiful places in Scotland and Lake District. But at the same time, he used to be perturbed by the sinking moral standards of people in various families.

He also visited countries like France, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, along with Scotland. He critically observed the cultural atmosphere, religious institutions, systems of education, social and family life as well as institutions involved in welfare work. He met many scholars and activists, visited famous monuments and places and observed and studied religious matters. Thus he sharpened his religious perception and prepared himself as an excellent missionary and returned to Hindustan in October, 1903.

The Prarthana Samaj at Bombay passed an unanimous resolution in November, 1903 and appointed Vitthal Ramji Shinde as the missionary of the Prarthana Samaj. Before going on to examine his contribution as a missionary, let us have a look at the nature of work of the Prarthana Samaj of Bombay.

The Brahmo Samaj was established as a monotheistic religious sect in Bengal in 1828 at the behest of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Thanks to the untiring efforts of thinkers like Babu Keshab Chandra Sen and missionaries like Shri Pratap Chandra Mujumdar, it soon became a force to reckon with. In Maharashtra, the Paramhamsa Sabha, which propounded monotheism, discarded idol worship and inspired people to eradicate the caste system, was established in 1840 under the leadership of Shri Ram Balkrishna Jaikar and Dr Atmaram Pandurang Tarkhadkar. This organization worked secretly as there was a good deal of opposition to its philosophy. Later on, when the secret list of its members was made public, it was dissolved, around 1860.

Babu Keshab Chandra Sen had visited Bombay in 1864 and delivered speeches on the Brahmo Philosophy. In 1866, some intellectuals such as Bal Mangesh Wagle, Bhaskar Hari Bhagwat, Mama Paramanand, Sarvottam Sakharam Mankar, Vasudeo Babaji Navrange, who were consciously thinking about religion, gathered together at the house of Dr Atmaram Pandurang. These friends met several times, and after several deliberations, decided to establish the Prarthana Samaj. Fired more by the desire to concentrate on spiritual matters, which they thought was the chief duty of man, rather than material well being, they decided to undertake work. On 31 March, 1867, they began their prayers. In the beginning, they used to be called "Ekeshwari Mandali[1] but later on changed their name to "Prarthana Samaj". Two great thinkers of the time, Justice Ranade and Dr R G Bhandarkar also became members in the first year. Shri Bhikaji Dada Chavan, a gentleman from the Bhandari caste used to organize the prayer sessions. He used to be referred to as 'Acharya' in the *Subodha Patrika*, organ of the Prarthana Samaj.

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[1] Ekeshawari Mandali : An association of people who believe in one god only.

Justice Rande wrote an essay, "A Theist's Confession" in which he expounded all the 39 principles of the Prarthana Samaj. Then, in 1873, Dr R G Bhandarkar reconstituted the principles acceptable to the Prarthana Samaj with the help of some of his colleagues. These six principles are nearer to the Upanishadic Philosophy contained the essence of the 39 principles enumerated by Justice Ranade. They were as follows :

1. God is the creator of this universe. He is the only true God: there is no other God besides Him. He is eternal, infinite, without form, all joy.
2. His worship alone leads to happiness in this world and the next.
3. Love and reverence for Him, an exclusive faith in Him, praying and singing to Him spiritually with these feelings and doing the things pleasing to Him constitute His true worship.
4. To worship and pray to images and other created objects is not the true mode of divine adoration.
5. God does not incarnate Himself and there is no one book which has been directly revealed by God.
6. All men are His children, therefore they should behave towards each other as brethren without distinction. This is pleasing to God and constitutes man's duty.

Dr Bhandarkar had discussed the position of the Prarthana Samaj on spiritual questions at length. According to him, prayer was essential for the upliftment of the soul. He felt that it united the mind with God. Prayers, he argued, were not meant for asking material things like food, clothes etc. What one should ask for oneself in a prayer is Purity and Good Will. Prayers, according to him, purged the mind of all "Vikaras," impure emotions. They awakened the conscience and created a spirit of universal brotherhood. This, he argued, was the experience of saints and sages. The Prarthana Samaj, thus, recommended prayer as the way to spiritual salvation and progress.

After the constitution of the Samaj, no work other than weekly prayers was undertaken in the initial stage. In 1876, Shri Bhikoba Dada Chavan, the first Acharya of the Prarthana Samaj, opened a night school in Chikhalwadi, Bombay, on behalf of the Theistic Association. This was followed up by the opening up of four more schools in Mumbai. Shri B B Korgaonkar opened one school for students from the untouchable castes in Madanpura, with the help of K Anandrao, who had stipulated that any type of publicity to this work be avoided. The reason was not very difficult to guess.

The caste prejudices were too strong to be broken down easily. In one of the programmes, when sweets were being distributed among students, some higher caste students plainly refused to accept the sweets along with the untouchable students. This incident symbolizes the enormous difficulties involved in working among the untouchables.

In 1882, Shri Sadashiv Pandurang Kelkar was appointed as the missionary for spreading the message of the Prarthana Samaj. Totally devoted and noble and very good at written Marathi, he was the ideal choice. He wrote various articles in *Subodha Patrika*. He began several movements such as 'Sangat Sabha', Prayer Singing, and Reading Books. Unfortunately, none of them lasted long. He used to run three classes for women to teach them English and organized their meetings each week. In 1894, he declared his wish to give up the post of missionary in the Prarthana Samaj and work independently as a Brahmo missionary. The Prarthana Samaj, was thus, till this time involved with work among women doing social work of a limited sphere.

This was the scenario of the Samaj when Vitthal Ramji Shinde began his work as a missionary. His area was limited to the Mumbai region. Though cities like Pune, Satara and Ahmadnagar also had their own Prarthana Samaj they were all independent. There was no central constitution of the Prarthana Samaj. Dr Bhandarkar was the sole founder member alive. All the other stalwarts, like Dr Atmarm Pandurang (1898), Bhaskar Hari Bhagwat, (1894), Tukaram Tatya Padwal (1898), Shankar Pandurang Pandit (1894), Justice Ranade (1901), Mama Paramanand and Waman Abaji Modak (1894), were dead. Dr Bhandarkar used to stay at Pune. In Bombay, it was Sir Narayanrao Chandavarkar, who had to take the responsibility of the Bombay Prarthana Samaj.

There are two aspects of the work of Vitthal Ramji Shinde as a missionary. One was organizational and the other was proselytizing. The first included such work as holding prayers, looking after the religious well-being of the members, arranging for ceremonies such as naming, *upanayana* and promoting programme for increasing good will and friendship among members. He displayed great imagination and organizational skills in his missionary work. In Europe, he had studied the work of the Postal Mission run by the Unitarian women. He wanted to start work on those lines in India and wrote to Shri Vasudevrao Sukhthankar, his friend and member of the Prarthana Samaj. The constitution of this work was ready by the time he returned to India. The work involved spreading the philosophy of the Prarthana Samaj by writing books and pamphlets, through postal correspondence, through conducting meetings and holding discussions with interested people and writing letters to them. Annasaheb carried out his work with great efficiency with the help of Shri Sukhthankar and another member, Shri Sayyad Abdul Kadar. Within a span of 10 years, he published 3438 books on the Brahmo philosophy, 12700 pamphlets, 633 Unitarian books and 5000 Unitarian pamphlets. "What is This Thing Called the Prarthana Samaj?" is the title of one of the booklets published. He also used to organize one "liberal religious reading class" every Wednesday evening in the Prarthana Samaj, for high school and college students, in order to make them interested in reading valuable religious books, where lectures were delivered and books by Armstrong and Prof Dyson Emerson were studied.

He also established the Young Theists Association in 1905, on the Dasara day, so as to encourage young people to know each other well, mix with each others' families, learn how to organize prayers and establish thicker bonds of love with the other members. He also looked after the twelve night schools for workers and wrote articles for *Subodha Patrika*. He also used to tour extensively for spreading the Brahmo philosophy. Satara, Nagar, Kolhapur, Indore, Manglore are some of the places he visited.

Annasaheb used to do 'kirtanas' as well. He performed one at Kolhapur in the Sansthana of Jagadguru Shankaracharya on 16 November, 1909. The Shankaracharya told him that he liked the external principles of the Brahmo Samaj.

But Annasaheb was not satisfied with the work of spreading the Brahmo thought only in the Bombay province. He wanted to take it all over India. Earlier, Justice Ranade had tried to organize Indian Monotheists' conference at the time when the Indian National Congress had its first convention. But such attempts had not been consistent. Annasaheb resolved to revamp this organization and from 1904 to 1913, he regularly organized the Conventions of the Dharma Parishada at the Conventions of the National Congress and did everything in his capacity as a secretary to make them a success.

In 1912, he published the Theistic Directory a collection of information about Monotheistic religions such as Brahmo Samaj and Prarthana Samaj. It contained up-to-date information about several local societies in India. Divided into two sections, the Directory provides information about the work of various sects of the liberal religions in the world in the first section and of the 168 institutions in India in the second. The Directory illustrates his perspective and vision as a missionary.

Shri B B Keskar in 1912 published a collection of V R Shinde's religious Marathi articles, speeches and sermons which illustrates the maturity of his religious thinking and the efficacy of his argument. It also contains a detailed account of the journeys undertaken and speeches delivered which evidences his commitment and diligent attitude to the mission undertaken.

Thus, Annasaheb was working imaginatively, selflessly, and with great energy and inspiration, for the spread of the Brahmo philosophy. Yet he had to resign from his post of a paid missionary of the Samaj in 1910. What was the reason behind it?

Within one year of having started the work of the Prarthana Samaj as a missionary, he had undertaken another stupendous task, revolutionary in terms of its significance, of the upliftment of the downtrodden untouchable castes. In 1906, he established the Depressed Classes Mission in order to give this tremendous work some discipline and order. Within the first three years, the mission managed to cover vast ground. Various branches were opened for the untouchables in and out of Bombay. The four in Bombay were at Parl, Devnar, Madanpura and Kamathipura. The others were at Pune, Manmad, Igatpuri, Indore, Akola, Amaravati, Dapoli, Mangalore, Madras, Nashik, Mahabaleshwar.

While Annasaheb was busy with this work, there was some dissatisfaction in the Prarthana Samaj at Bombay. Objections were raised with respect to perfectly innocuous points such as keeping a diary, sending reports of the work done. But the real reasons behind these were quite different. There is no bitterness in Annasaheb's account of these in his autobiography. He just says,

> "I could not fit my work in the rigid frame of the written rules and regulations, nor could I insist on my position. I was almost at my wits' end. I had accepted the work of the Samaj as my spiritual duty. I did not

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> want to resign from it as if it were an ordinary job. How could I resign from the 'job' of mine when I hadn't even applied for it in the first place?"

The only way out of this was not to accept the stipend of Rs 60 per month the Samaj was paying him. So he declined to accept the stipend. Then in November, 1910, the Commitee of the Prarthana Samaj passed a resolution and terminated his relation with the Samaj as a missionary and informed him of it.

The real reasons lie in the middle class bourgeois policies of the Prarthana Samaj. There is a very clear note under the date 17 January, 1935 in his dairy :

> "For the last 20/25 years, the Prarthana Samaj didn't have anything to do with me. Reasons?

1. Politics
2. I established a separate mission for the untouchables
3. My independent, straightforward stance."

Shinde had been assisted in his establishment of the Mission by the president of the Samaj Sir Narayanrao Chandavarkar, Vice President Shet Damodar Das Sukhadwala. He also had friends such as Shri D G Vaidya, Shri B B Keskar and Shri B B Korgaonkar in the Samaj. But personal matters and policies of the Samaj were two independent issues.

The Prarthana Samaj at Bombay carried an imprint of essentially middle class concerns. The senior members of the Prarthana Samaj had most cautiously adopted the strategy of never inviting the wrath of the British Government and were very careful about it. They wanted reforms, of course. But their main emphasis was on religious matters. Social reforms as such had a very low priority on their agenda. And the reforms they talked about had only middle class appeal, such as widow remarriage, inter caste marriages, general knowledge and English language classes for the womenfolk of the Samajists etc. Probably the

Samaj did not appreciate wasting so much more energy on upliftment of the untouchables than on spreading of the Brahmo philosophy. And Shinde had tremendously increased the scope of the work of the mission. For him the task of upliftment of untouchables constituted real religious work. His view of religion itself was different from that of the Samajists. Let us see how.

It has already been stated that Annasaheb had grown up in an atmosphere charged with the ethos of Bhagwat Dharma. When he was in the Fergusson college in 1898, he used to write a diary. During this period he had resolved to be a member of the Prarthana Samaj. At the same time, he had a deep rooted desire to undertake the work of upliftment of the lowest of the untouchables such as the Mahars and the Mangs. Both of his resolutions reflect his high spiritual nature. For him, religious work and social work were not separate. He also did not consider religion as separate from highly moral material practices. His views on religion were not narrow. For him religion did not mean meditating in lonely spots, or organizing prayers in public. For him, spiritual matters and socio-political work of high moral character were the same; and so were religious and other material feelings. This view of religion was expounded by him in his diary written during his prison days in 1930 and is reiterated again in his autobiography. He writes :

> "It cannot be said that the religious fervour is essentially different from children's love of sport, young men's esteem for women and old people's benevolent contemplation. When these natural emotions of the heart develop in a purer, more extensive and stronger form, we call it 'Bhakti', Devotion. Both this worldy and spiritual are for me one and the same."

His view of religion includes renunciation as well as faith and unselfish love. While commenting on the nature of love, he says : "Love means enthusiasm, not apathy."

And social work also has to have the foundation of such love. According to him, doing every small thing in life with love and care is nothing else but religion. "Isn't an honest carpenter, a clever barbar and especially a kind scavenger (Bhangi), hundred times more religious than a brahmin who uses religion for making money?"

Shinde had a great respect for Raja Ram Mohun Roy. While commenting on his religious faith, he says :

> "Religion, for him, was not just a belief or an attitude but the whole life itself, with all its aspects. All his endeavour, his very life and death, were for the sake of political and economic upliftment and religious and social reforms."

Like Raja Ram Mohun Roy, even Shinde's concept of religion was essentially all pervasive, encompassing all life which tried to enhance all aspects of life. His perspective and work were thus religious in the true sense of the term.

A careful understanding of his religious perspective is essential for comprehending his work. He was influenced right from his childhood by the liberal philosophy of the Bhagwata dharama. That is why the monotheistic, Brahmo religious philosophy which rejected idol worship, which refuted the concepts of Avatara and blind dogmatism and which asked people to maintain harmony amongst themselves in the spirit of universal brotherhood, naturally appealed to his mind. He devoted his whole life to the dissemination of this philosophy among common people. There was no place in his mind for discrimination and inequality. That is why he devoted the whole of his life to the task of eradication of untouchability and all round development of untouchables. This work for him constituted religious work. He has claimed so in explicit terms : "Eradication of untouchability is a vital part of my religious work." For him, this task and the task of disseminating the thought of the Prarthana Samaj were equally religious.

4

TOWARDS ERADICATION OF UNTOUCHABILITY

The first pioneering attempts in the nineteenth century towards eradication of untouchability and for the development of untouchables were made by Jotiba Phule. In the year 1851, Phule had opened a school for untouchable children, the first of its kind. But these attempts, unfortunately, were rather short-lived. It would certainly be unfair to hold Phule responsible for this. The entire social structure was hardly conducive to such work. Phule was confronted with problems of various people from brahmin widows to exploited farmers. There is no evidence to suggest that Phule was aided in this monumental task by his contemporaries, especially from the middle class. Even Ramjibaba Walagkar of Mahad or Shivaram Janba Kamble, two renowned leaders of untouchables in the last decades of the nineteenth century, seem to have struggled more for concessions for untouchables in jobs in the army rather than against social injustice. All that the Mumbai Prarthana Samaj did for this class was,open a couple of night schools for them. In Bengal, around 1865, Shashipad Bannerjee had attempted to improve their condition. Sayajirao Maharaj of Baroda had started schools for untouchables in his state in 1883. Towards the end of the century, there were twenty two such schools in Baroda. But these attempts were naturally confined only to Baroda. In 1894, Colonel Alcott, President of the then Theosophical Society, had opened one school in a hut in Madras, to be followed by two more such schools next year. But all of these attempts in India were essentially sporadic and local.

Besides, most of these attempts were motivated by an urge to educate the untouchables rather than to eradicate social injustice. In short, the question of centuries old social injustice remained completely unvoiced at the beginning of the twentieth century. There was, similarly, a conspicuous lack of any general awareness about the horrible conditions the caste system had unleashed in the society.

It was in such an atmosphere that Vitthal Ramji Shinde raised his voice against the social injustice meted out to the untouchables and undertook institutionalised efforts for their development. The scope of his work spread far and wide, beyond the narrow confines of a small state or province, over the whole country. His was the perspective of a true visionary.

Right from his school days, he had felt a deep sense of compassion for the untouchables and wanted to devote his whole life for the eradication of untouchability. This is clearly reflected in the note in his diary of 1898 about Shri Kalaskar. After returning from England, he had toured all over India as a missionary of the Prarthana Samaj. He had an opportunity to study their conditions extensively. One event in his life on a dark night in the summer of 1905 indicates how the idea of establishing the Depressed Classes Mission Society of India germinated in his mind. He had camped at Ahmadnagar during his tour. Some leaders of the untouchables, viz, Shripatrao Thorat and Pandurang Laxman Dangle, had organized a meeting at a village called Bingar. They invited Annasaheb for this meeting. In his speech, he was explaining to the audience a printed pamphlet of Somavanshi Hitachintak Samaj established by Shri Kisan Phaguji Bansode, especially, the objectives stated in it. One of the objectives was to develop awareness among the untouchables without hurting the feelings of the upper castes. When he was explaining this, a tremendous awakening stirred in his heart. "I had an intense feeling", he described later, "that I had to devote the whole of my life to this work. I distinctly remember to have resolved that very night to undertake this task without any further delay."

After having studied the conditions of untouchables all over India, in 1906, he delivered in Mumbai a speech in English in front of the Social Reform Association, which was published later on as a pamphlet. In this speech, he systematically reviewed the efforts for reforms by both the upper castes and the untouchables themselves. He emphasised on the need of a native mission. "What is wanted therefore is not merely a machinery of education however grand but a real mission i.e., an organization in which the personal element presides over and energizes the mechanism; and secondly, which is still more essential, a mission which is not exotic but indigenous or in other words a mission which is bent upon working an evolution but not a revolution, as Christian Missions are, in the religion, traditions, and social life of these people." With this aim, he established the Depressed Classes Mission Society of India on 18 October, 1906. The work began with the establishment of a school for the children of untouchables in the bungalow of Murarji Walji near Elphinstone Road in Mumbai. Sir Naraynrao Chandawarkar, who was the President of the Mission, gave an enlightening speech in which he said,

> "Undertaking this task of upliftment of these co-called lowly people, we have, in fact, undertaken a task to uplift ourselves. This is a sacred duty and let us never have the arrogance to think that we are their saviours."

In his comprehensive article, "Bahishkrut Bharat," which was written in 1909, he discussed the nature of this problem and also his own position. Right at the beginning, he stated that untouchability was nothing but the excommunication of the so-called lowly castes. But actually who was being excommunicated? The low castes or the Hindu religion in them? He answered, "No creature created by God is considered untouchable. But these people, though human beings, are still driven away by us. We touch a Mahar's dog but not a Mahar. We touch him, but only when he has discarded his Hindu religion." It was this paradox that led Shinde to argue that ultimately the Hindu religion itself was being excommunicated through the custom of untouchability.

Shinde went on to write extensively on this problem. "Why should they be considered untouchables? How are they different? Actually, they are quite similar to the castes like Maratha. It seems that various castes have mingled in them. In Kathewad, there are six subcastes of Bhangis, all of whom have authentic Rajput names such as Rathod, Parmar, Solanki etc. The Mahars in Maharashtra have the same surnames as those of the real "authentic" 96 families such as Jadhav, Salunkhe, Gaikwad, Chalukya, Pawar, More, Shelar, Salvi, Suryavanshi etc. The language of the Mahars in Maharashtra appears to be like that of the Maratha Kunbis. They worship the same gods of Marathas such as Khandoba, Bhairoba, Bhawani etc. They flock to the same holy places for pilgrimages such as Nashik, Paithan, Pandharpur, Tulajapur etc. Similarly, they have a long history of sects like the Warkari sect." He also pointed out elsewhere that the Mahars are distant cousins of the Marathas and he seems to have arrived at the conclusion that the untouchables were once kings who had enjoyed regal affluence.

Thus, the treatment meted out to the low castes by the upper caste Hindus was unjust and harsh. But what was the attitude of the so-called just British? Shinde subjected the British also to a keen scrutiny :

> "Compared to the all round progress, power, wealth and wisdom of the British, the attention these people have received is really little. The Government makes no distinction between people of low castes and upper castes while collecting taxes on salt, land, revenue etc.

> But at all public places, like the courts of law, dispensaries and hospitals, schools, post offices, the untouchables are discriminated against by the British in the same way as the upper castes. As a result of this, these people, who already have to suffer various indignities, difficulties and oppression, are subjected to even more injustices."

Arguing thus, he asked the British Government why it did not apply the same principle of equality in protecting the subjects which it observed in collecting taxes.

He could foresee another problem. He analysed the census figures of 1901, and discovered that out of the total population of 31 crores, six crores were Muslims and 20 and a half were Hindus. Out of these,five and a half crore were untouchables. This meant that more than one sixth of the population was excommunicated. The question, he said, was, should this population live in extremely impoverished conditions? The Hindu society, he observed, was not prepared to give up their privileges and they had a couldn't-care-less attitude. Then should this class of people become Christians? Then the picture would change quite a lot with 15 crore Hindus, 15 crore Christians, and six crore Muslims. This would mean that the country would be divided not only into two groups of Hindus and Muslims but Hindus, Muslims and Christians. How would the fifteen crores of Hindus and equal number of Muslims and Christians get along with each other? Shinde was not arguing thus from a religious point of view. He was a loyal Brahmo Samaji who believed in a Universal religion. But what he was concerned about was the condition of the untouchables and the unity of the Hindu society. He did not want the society to disintegrate. In his essay "Bahishkrut Bharat," he significantly proposed that the untouchables were nothing but the excommunicated India.

He began the work of development of the untouchables and transforming their life by establishing the Mission.

His understanding of this question was two-fold. Hence his work also had two aspects. His logic was simple. Where is this untouchability? It is imaginary. It has no objective support. People who called themselves "Sprushyas" decided that some castes were untouchable. A red flower may be said to have the quality of redness but untouchability does not have this kind of objective existence. If the upper castes decided that some castes were untouchable, then untouchability came into existence as a result of the ideology of the upper castes. Destruction of the false sense of superiority in the minds of the so-called upper castes was the first aspect of his work. The second was to destroy the lowly qualities that had been generated by the caste system among the untouchables, to raise their consciousnesss, to awaken their sense of self esteem, to educate them and to transform them into enterprenerus. He sought their spiritual development as well. And through his Mission, he achieved both these objectives admirably.

The Mission began its work with a view to spread education among the untouchables, to obtain employment for them, to solve their social problems and to inculcate in them qualities like love for universal religion, personal morality and civic virtues. In the first three years, the scope of the work had grown to vast proportions. Marathi schools at Parel, Deonar, Madanpura in Mumbai were started, Sunday schools were opened at Kamathipura, and programmes such as lectures and prayer sessions were organised. A factory of new types of shoes was started under the guidance of a German expert. The Nirashrit Seva Sadan was established to serve sick, destitute women. Several schools were opened at various distant places outside Mumbai, like Puṇe, Manmad, Igatpuri, Indore, Akola, Amaravati, Dapoli, Mangalore, Madras, Mahabaleshwar etc. By 1909, the Mission had 12 branches, 12 day schools, four industrial schools in which 1018 students received education.

The Mission had seven life-member secretaries. Shri

Waman Sadashiv Sohoni, Shri Sayyad Abdul Kadar and Annasaheb's sister Janabai became life members to serve in the Mission.

The Mission was located in a Chawl near the Globe Mill so that the wives and children of missionaries could live with the untouchables residing around. The school, dispensary and workshop were located on the ground floor. Vitthal Ramjis family— his old parents, (they also worked for the mission), his sister Janabai, and the family of Sayyad Abdul Kadar stayed on the first floor.

With the inspiration and financial help of Shri Malabari and Shri Dayaram Gidumal, the Mission had established the Nirashrit Seva Sadan in order to extend help to destitute women. When one small girl called Gangu living in the Seva Sadan suffered from a severe attack of diarrhoea, Vitthal Ramji's mother nursed her like a mother. His sister Janabai often used to be derided as a Christian when she went to people's houses to help them. When a young girl, who had been offered to god as a "Murali" and deserted, was infected with venereal disease, she could not be kept in the Sadan. Janabai rented a room for her at Bhaikhala and nursed her patiently in spite of all the trouble she gave her. The girl got married to a person from Hyderabad later on and began working as a teacher. Annasaheb's father also used to help the Mission by looking after the maintenance of accounts. Thus the entire family was involved with the work of the mission. The progressive outlook and generosity shown by his old parents in that orthodox atmosphere appears to be not only astonishing but ideal. In a short span of time, Annasaheb was able to expand the scope of his work to the whole country. The Mission organised its first programme of distribution of awards in 1909. Shrimant Sayajirao Gaikwad presided over the function and gave away the awards. Such programmes reflected his understanding of the problem of untouchability as well as his organisational skills. He wanted to uplift the untouchables from their conditions, create an awareness in them about their own situation and this he intended to achieve through schools, workshops and moral education. The other part of his work was to destory the illusory concept of untouchability in the minds of the upper castes and create in them a sense of equality. This was sought to be achieved through organisation of various programmes such as conferences, tours, "rice-funds", "rupee funds" etc. He successfully organised one conference in the amphitheatre of Fergusson college on a grand scale in 1912. The success of such a huge task of annihilation of untouchability depended greatly on the cooperation of people from all sections of society. It is surprising to see that Annasaheb could enlist the support and sympathy of people from diverse groups— His highness Sayajirao Gaikwad, Tukojirao Holkar, Maharaja of Mysore-Kantirav; English officers such as Sir John Clerk, Sir Muir Mackenzy, Dr Mann political leaders (both radicals and moderates) such as Sir Chandawarkar, Wrangler, R P Paranjape, Lokmanya Tilak; leaders of the untouchable castes like Mahar, Chambhar, Mang such as Shri Shivram Janba Kamble, Shri Dangle, Natha Maharaj, Shri Nadane etc.

Several political and religious leaders representing different ideologies praised Shinde for the work the Mission had achieved when the Mission day was celebrated in 1909. The representative of the Shankaracharya of Humpi made a speech on this occassion and donated three hundred rupees. Shinde believed that conferences were useful in eradicating the idea of untouchability in the minds of the upper castes. He started to organise the conferences of the Mission at the same place and time of the annual conferences of Indian National Congress. The mission was established in 1906. The conferences were organised every subsequent year in 1907 at Surat, 1908 at Madras, in 1909 at Lahore, in 1910 at Allahabad, in 1912 at Bankipur and in 1913 at Karachi. Thus the Mission could attract the attention of all the leaders who had come for the Congress conference and get a lot of help in starting the work of the Mission in various places. In 1912, after just six years from its establishment, the Mission had opened 23 schools at 14 places, with 55 teachers, 1100 students and five hostels. There were 12 other institutions and seven missionaries. In all, the Mission had started work in seven states of Western and Southern India.

Annasaheb aimed at moral development and self reliance of the untouchable students. Hence he combined schools with workshops. In the school at Mumbai, training in book binding, carpentry and tailoring was imparted; in Mangalore students were taught to work on the handlooms; at Mahabaleshwar, training in making cane baskets and ropes was given. His idea of industrial training was to give the student some practical skill so as to be able to support oneself later. He knew that if the students were not trained for such things, they would end up doing nothing and getting frustrated. Therefore all the students in his schools and especially those in hostels, had to spend at least two hours every day in some kind of workshop in his training schools.

Vitthal Ramji Shinde was concerned about the development of all castes that were considered untouchable. The Mangs at Satara were considered born criminals and often treated roughly and unjustly. Vitthal Ramji took initiative in improving their condition. The Governor also agreed to his suggestion of alloting some place for establishing a farming village for these people. Shinde examined the forest areas on the borders of Satara, Sangli and Budhgaon and even selected the land. But soon the first world war started and the Government reserved this land for soldiers and their families. Later on the same land was utilised for establishing the Willingdon college. But had this idea of establishing a farming village for Mangs materialised then, it would have been a good demonstration of a new experiment in the rehabilitation of the so-called convict castes and changed their destiny.

Shinde had made several suggestions to the Government for the development of the untouchables such as :

1. More schools to be opened in both villages and cities for the children of the untouchables; 2. At least one industrial school should be connected to a school in the district; 3. They should be paid generous wages; 4. They should start cooperatives; 5. Concrete efforts to be done for all these.

Annasaheb considered that the question of untouchability had to be politically stated for the speedy development of the untouchable class. He tried hard for eight to ten years to make the Congress pass a resolution. Finally, in 1917, his efforts were rewarded. Dr Anne Besant, member and well wisher of the Mission, familiar with its work, became President of the Congress. Then Shinde canvassed hard for the resolution and the Congress, because of Annie Besant, did pass it. The resolution was :

> "The National Congress appeals to the people of India to immediately put a stop to the oppression of the untouchables."

Once the National Congress passed such a resolution, all the state branches also supported it and the task of eradication of untouchability became part of the national agenda. In 1918, Maharshi Shinde organised the All India Conference on Eradication of Untouchability. His Highness Sayajirao Maharaj was the president. Several leaders such as Bipinchandra Pal, Jamanadas Dwarakadas, Barrister Jaikar, Bhulabhai Desai were present for this conference. Mahatma Gandhi, Tagore, Karveer Shankaracharya had sent felicitating telegrams. Signatures of nearly 300 leaders were obtained on a proclamation to literally observe all the conditions stated in the resolution about the eradication of untouchability. A momentous task had been achieved indeed.

But it was when Shinde was thus busy in extending the scope of the work of the Mission, that he had to dissociate himself from the Mission. In 1912, he had shifted the central office of the Mission from Mumbai to Pune. Shrimant Tukojirao Holkar, who highly appreciated the work of the Mission, had donated a sum of twenty thousand rupees to the Mission as a token of his appreciation. The Mission had also received a grant of Rs 80,000 from the Government through Sir R P Paranjape, a minister in the Government, who also was a friend of the Mission. The Mission bought the land where Mahatma Phule had first established a school for untouchable children, along with eight acres of adjoining land, in Bhokarwadi. The work of constructing a building for the mission, called the "Ahalyashram" was undertaken. It was around this time that some people, connected with the Mission, started vituperative attacks on the Mission but their real target was Vitthal Ramji Shinde. They charged that the Mission frittered away money on construction work and technical education. In the light of this criticism, Shinde decided to sever his links with the Mission after completing the construction of Ahalyashram. He refuted all the charges against him publicly, through newspapers. The Mission, he claimed, was established with the express intention of creating awareness and self-esteem among the untouchables, and making them self reliant. He said he was happy to note that the Mission was on its way to achieve these aims. Since the Mission was meant for these people, it was only appropriate that they should run it. He drafted the new constitution of the Mission, got it passed and saw to it that the Mission would not go into the hands of a particular caste. The new constitution stipulated that 2/3 members of the governing body must be untouchables and it should have two members each from the Mahar, Chambhar, Mang, Bhangi and the Muslim communities and one member each from the Maratha, Brahmin and Non-Brahmin communities. After having done this, he left the Mission which he himself had established and nurtured. He had spent eighteen years of his youth for this task. And he quitely endured all the insults hurled at him by the very people for whom he had worked tirelessly. But he did not have any bitter feelings in his mind.

He severed his links with the Mission, but not with the task of eradication of untouchability that he had undertaken. This work was for him a sacred, religious duty. He could not forsake it. That is why he went on to participate in the Satyagraha at Vycome, in the state of Travancore, along with Sadhu Shivaprasad, the leader of the untouchables, during the rainy season in 1924. He entered into arguments with Mahatma Gandhi on the issue of untouchables. He complained that Gandhi and Congress did not pay sufficient attention to this problem. On 25 November, 1924, he wrote a letter to Mahatma Gandhi in which he said, "Your first priority is Khadi, second Hindu-Muslim unity and the eradication of untouchability, probably has a third place in your heart. But,- for me, this problem has the highest priority. You, of course, know the difference between what the Congress professes and what it actually does." He went on to say, "No one except you and Rajgopalachari in the Subjects Committee at Nagpur showed any interest in this problem. The satyagraha in the south was skillfully ignored. Neither you nor Malaviyaji could manage to come to Vycome." This clearly reflects how valiantly he fought for the untouchables.

The introduction he wrote to a book called *Parvati Satyagraha* written by Shri S B Landge in 1929 is another instance of his intense involvement with this problem. "At such a crucial time of the satyagraha," he wrote, "some patriots, on behalf of the Indian National Congress, advised the untouchables to do nothing but wait patiently and it is most unfortunate, nay it is a sign of national debility, that leaders like Mahatma Gandhi maintain an untimely silence about it. I demand that the final decision on this question be taken before the midnight of 31 December, 1929. It was a mistake on the part of Mahatma Gandhi and all of us that things were allowed to drift until the

Satyagraha became inevitable." He went on to warn, "It would be hazardous for the whole world if Hindustan goes on to enjoy freedom without eradicating untouchability."

In 1932, when there was a talk of creating separate constituencies for the untouchables and Mahatma Gandhi had declared a fast, Shinde supported common constituencies with great fervour and irrefutable logic. A meeting was organised in Dane Ali at Pune, to support common constituencies, where he was in the chair. He believed that to grant separate constituencies to the untouchables was to give a permanent sanction to untouchability. And he had, right from the beginning, argued for the assimilation of the untouchables with the upper caste Hindus. He had maintained that there should be no separate words to refer to them. He devoted his entire life for this task. His efforts to improve the status of the untouchables in a way signified the development of the Bhagawat Dharma as well.

5

MORE RELIGIOUS WORK

Vitthal Ramji Shinde was a loyal Brahmo Samaji. When he was formally free of responsibilities of the Mission in 1923, the Brahmo Samaj was still functional in South India, especially in Mangalore, Calicut, Coimbatore and Travancore. But there was no missionary who officially belonged to the Brahmo Samaj of Calcutta. The work of the Samaj was being conducted in a haphazard and unsystematic manner. There was an acute need of an experienced and devoted missionary in this area. The Brahmo Samaj, in Calcutta selected him as their representative to work in the south. The Brahmo Samaj at Mangalore was fixed as his central place. He knew Kannada well. Besides there was also a branch of the Depressed Classes Mission established by Shri K Rangrao. He had visited Mangalore earlier in 1907 and people there had liked him very much. The Brahmo Samaj at Mangalore was happy to welcome him as their 'Acharya.'

After reaching Mangalore, Shinde began working among people from all sects and religions. He sought to spread the liberal religion through prayers and speeches. He also used the Hindu Kirtana[1] for this purpose. Christians were a majority community here. Sometimes he went there and performed a kirtana with the story of a Roman Catholic saint. Several new and old Catholics came to the Brahmo Mandir to attend his kirtanas. It is while serving here that Shinde staged a Satyagraha against preventing untouchables to enter the temple at Vycome. He attempted to enter the temple with Sadhu Shivprasad who had been an untouchable. The police refused entry to Shivprasad and said that he would be granted permission only if he declared himself a non-Hindu. Shinde had a long argument with the "Diwan" (prime minister) of the state on this issue but it fell on deaf ears.

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[1] Kirtana : a folk form in which stories from Puranas, the Epics are narrated to the accompainment of vocal and instrumental music.

But the Mangalore Prarthana Samaj found politics an anathema. People in the Brahmo Samaj who belonged to the Billava caste used to be considered untouchables previously. After a couple of generations in the Brahmo Samaj, these people had started getting lucrative jobs in the Government as well as in European companies. They started suspecting that Annasaheb Shinde, who used to wear a Gandhi cap on his head, was a political worker. They wanted to lay down conditions on him such as that he should not wear a Gandhi cap or khadi. Ten Samajis lodged a complaint against him with the Samaj at Calcutta. Annasaheb was not prepared to work under such conditions. He was not prepared to compromise his political opinions. At this time the Ahalyashram at Pune was to be inaugurated. The Pune branch of the Mission had invited him most cordially for this function. So he decided to give up his post as an Acharya in the Samaj and sought the permission of the Calcutta Brahmo Samaj for doing so. He returned to Pune for good in April, 1925.

After coming back, he prepared a plan of religious activities to be undertaken. In 1898, when he was still a student in the Fergusson college, he had opined that there was a great need for disseminating liberal religions like the Brahmo Samaj among the lower castes and rural populace. He started thinking about this problem and prepared a plan of Family Prayer Association. His sister Janabai also helped him in this task. Several progressive people, such as Shri Baburao Jagtap, Ganapatrao Shinde, Ramrao Jotirao Shinde, Jedhe, Kalbhor etc, endorsed this plan. Annasaheb and Janabai started to visit their houses by turn every Sunday and held prayer sessions of the Brahmo Samaj there. After one year, they prepared the constitution of the Family Prayer Association.

The Pamphlet of this Association was as follows :

The Family Prayer Association An Appeal

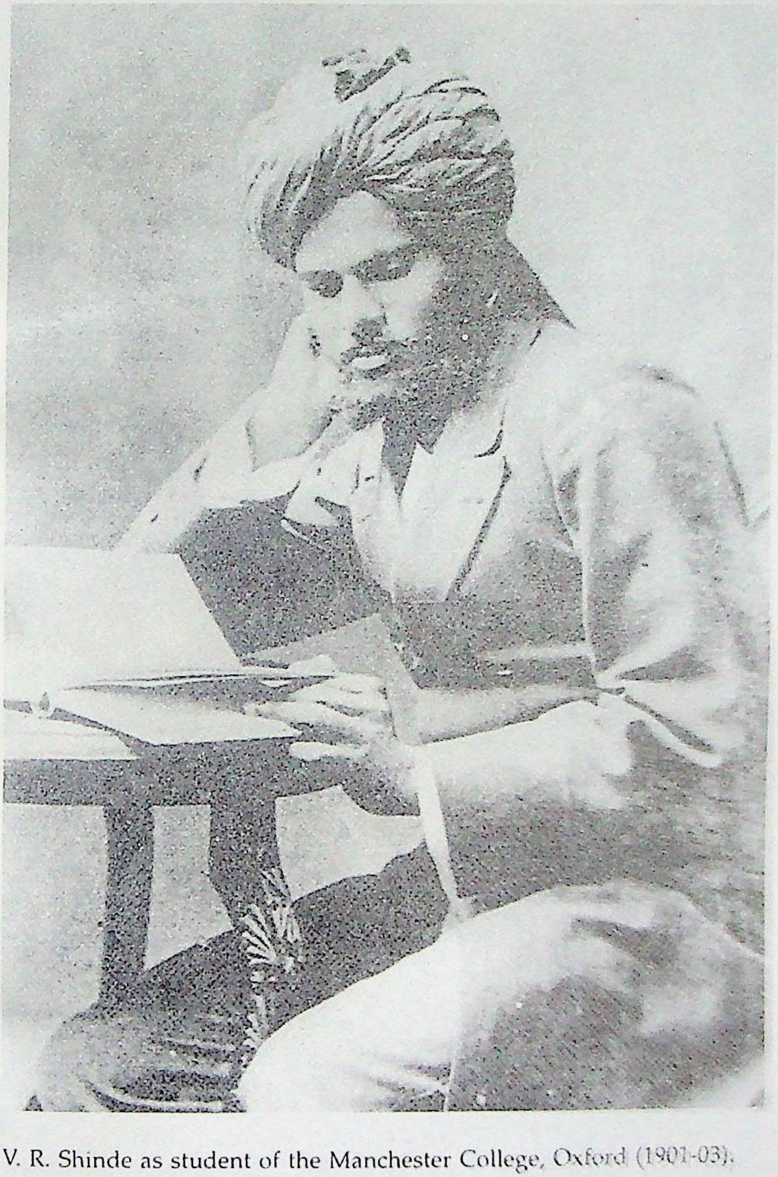
1. These days the situation of our people has deteriorated miserably. Spiritual matters are being made fun of. The young have become atheists and the old frustrated. Man has ceased to believe in man. The reason? The foundation of religion is collapsing.
2. It is mostly the elderly people who think about religion at all. This also has become rare. It is not at all surprising that such one-sided thinking and prayers have no effect whatsoever on the family. Real religious prayers have to be done collectively by the whole family. Therefore all people who are inspired by true faith and love should regularly come together for prayers.
3. Religion is not just an opinion. Nor is it only philosophy and outward rituals. Religion is essentially a matter of the heart and feelings. Hence it is proper that the family be the vehicle of the rise and dissemination of religion. History also testifies to this fact. Family is not just the wife. It is, in fact, the centre of love and affection of everybody —parents, brothers, sisters and children. All of them together, not just the individual, are the nodes for practising and disseminating religion.
4. In the light of this philosophy, the Association desires to prepare a constitution of an independent, pure and practicable prayer. Those who agree with these views are cordially invited to join in this endeavour along with their families. Those without a family can join individually but such people cannot become members. The Association has no desire to judge anybody's personal opinions or family traditions nor does it wish

to decide what they should be. The Association has no such authority. It believes that instead of peeping into others minds and nurturing suspicions about them, it is better to gather together for cleansing the mind. That, according to us, is the true prayer.

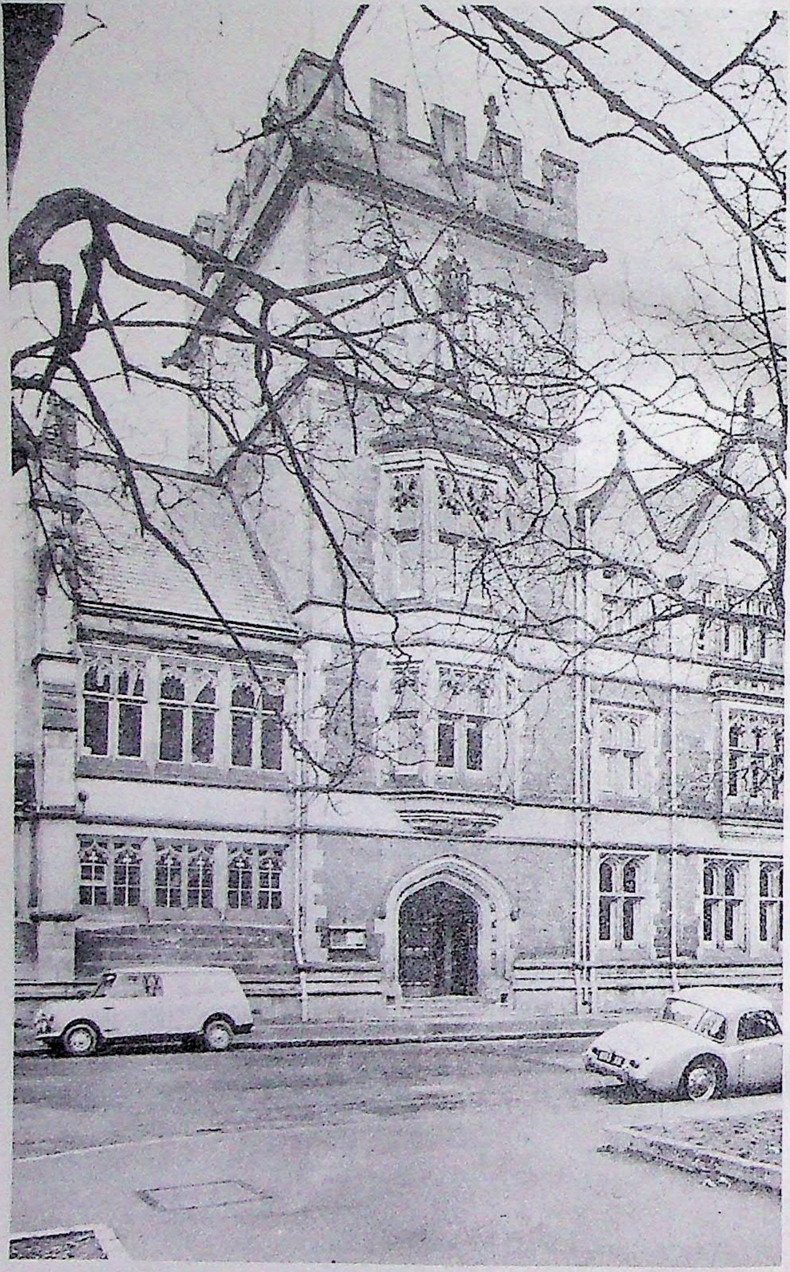
5. The Association has no right whatsoever to consider the status, caste, nationality or religions of the families. The only condition is that members must have real faith and sincerity and it must be demonstrated through virtues like regularity, punctuality, stability and peacefulness.
6. The activities of the Association will not be conducted, as other material activities are, on the basis of majority opinion. Matters will be resolved and executed according to their merit and propriety.

In short, the participation of the whole family was sought in the programmes of worship and prayers. The dissemination of religion, it was believed, could be done properly only through the family. Family was defined as the centre which united all members of the household through bonds of love and affection. It was with this perspective that an appeal was made to people to join the Association with their families. Initially, the secretary of the Association was Shri Krishnarao Govinda Patade. Later on Shri Baburao Jagtap took his place. Some 12 families became members of this Association. Within six months, thirty prayer sessions and five kirtanas were performed. Even elderly women attended these along with their daughters and daughters-in-law. Records show that in December 1926, all the members went for an outing and spent a whole day in the company of nature. It was a spiritual celebration.

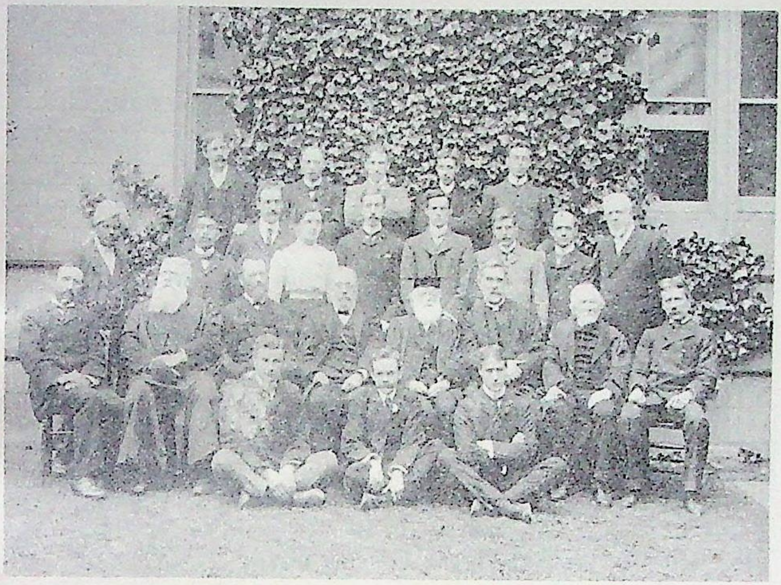
The annual programme of the Association was celebrated in Shri Shivaji High School, on 17 July, 1927. All the members had been invited. Guests from outside, like Shri Govindrao Sasne and Shrimati Anandibai Shirke



V. R. Shinde as student of the Manchester College, Oxford (1901-03).



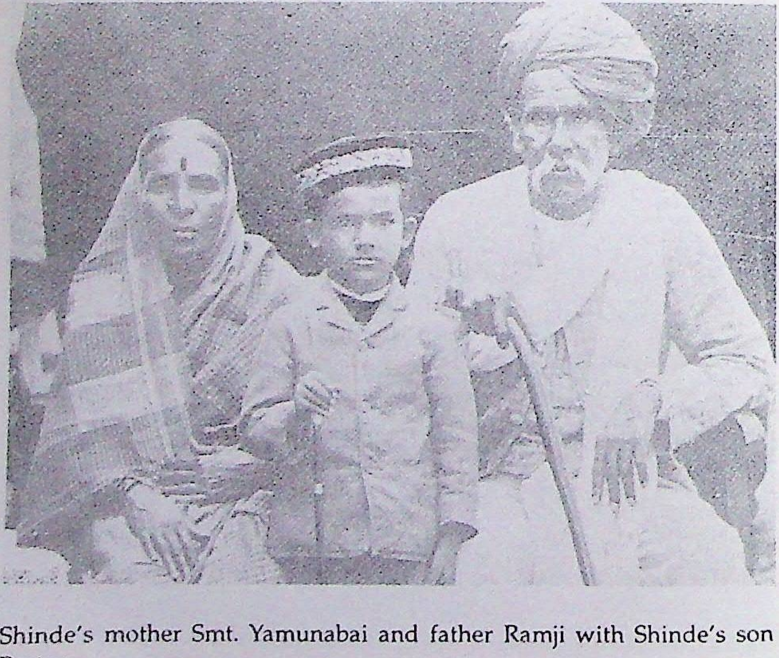
Manchester College, Oxford.



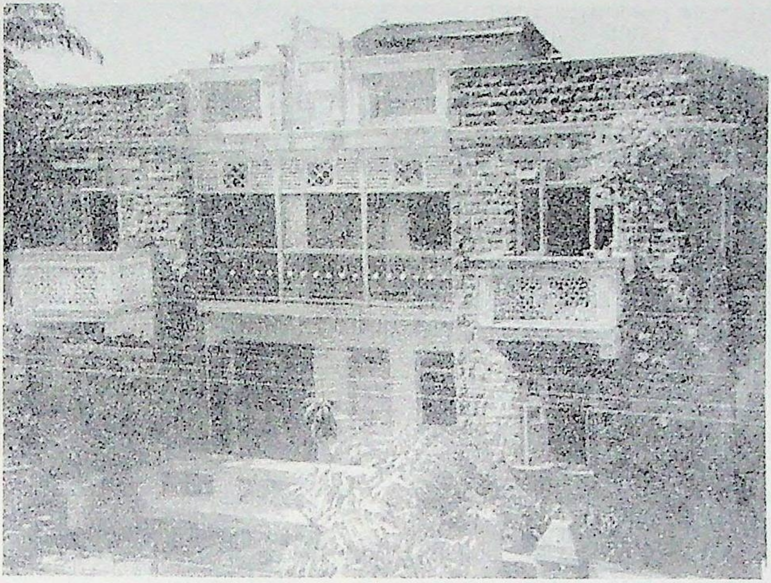
Shinde (first from left in first row of standing) with professors and fellow students at the Manchester College, Oxford, in 1902.

Shinde's wife Smt. Rukminibai.

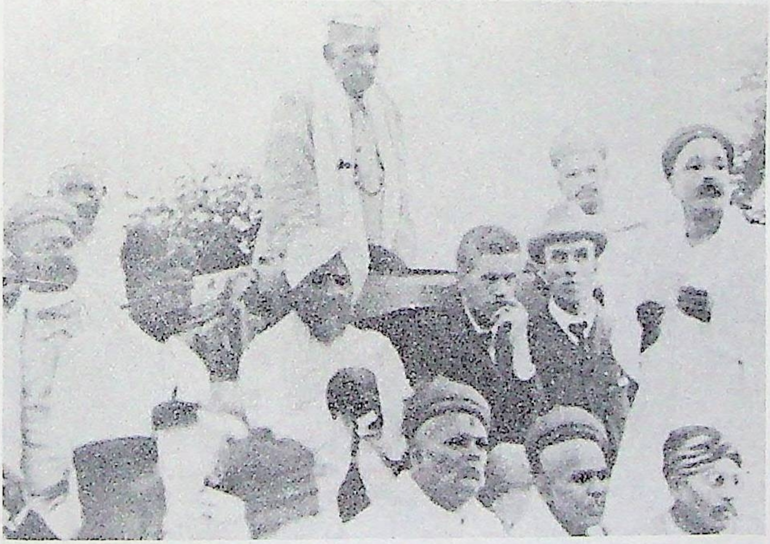
Shinde's sister Smt. Janabai.



Shinde's mother Smt. Yamunabai and father Ramji with Shinde's son Pratap.

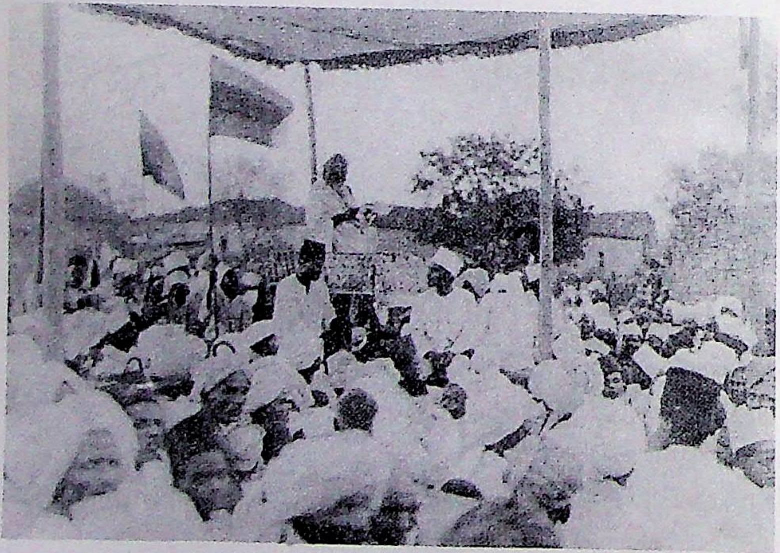


Shinde's house in Shivajinagar, Pune.

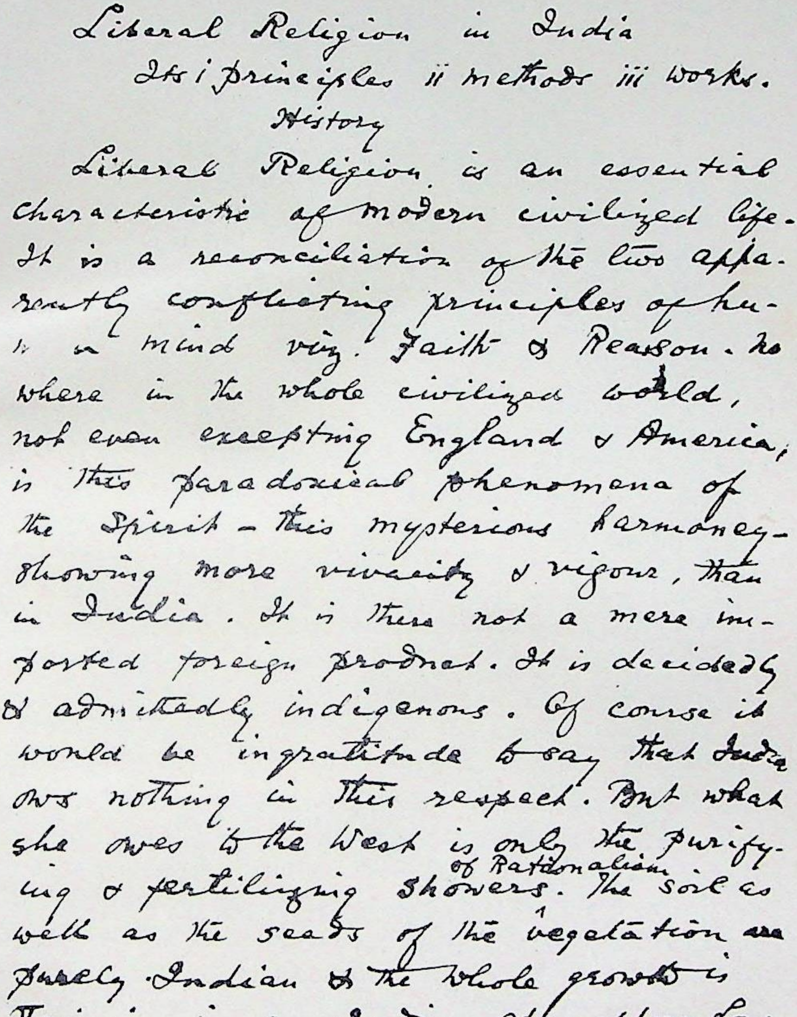


Shinde participating in a prohibition meeting at Pune on 23 April 1907 which was presided over by R. G. Bhandarkar. Also seen are Lokamanya Tilak, N. C. Kelkar, H. N. Apte, H. Mann and others (Shinde is seen below Bhandarkar).

As the missionary of the Bombay Prarthana Samaj (1910).



Shinde addressing a peasants' conference at Walve in Satara district on 6 June 1931. Nearly six thousand peasants assembled here.



Liberal Religion in India
Its i principles ii methods iii works.
History

Liberal Religion is an essential characteristic of modern civilized life. It is a reconciliation of the two apparently conflicting principles of human mind viz. Faith & Reason. No where in the whole civilized world, not even excepting England & America, is this paradoxical phenomena of the Spirit – this mysterious harmoney – showing more vivacity & vigour, than in India. It is there not a mere imported foreign product. It is decidedly & admittedly indigenous. Of course it would be ingratitude to say that India ows nothing in this respect. But what she owes to the West is only the purifying & fertilizing showers of Rationalism. The soil as well as the seeds of the vegetation are purely Indian & the whole growth is thriving in an Indian atmosphere. Long before the birth of Modern civilization

Shinde's handwriting.

Maharshi Vittal Ramji Shinde.

also had come specially for this function. All families, including those of the untouchables, ate food together without any kind of discrimination.

The Family Prayer Association celebrated days like Gautam Buddha Jayanti, Christa Jayanti outside the city, in nature worship. On this occasion, members had the opportunity of listening to lectures by eminent scholars such as Prof Dharmanand Kosambi, Dr. G.Y. Chitnis. Maharshi Shinde sometimes preached on these occasions.

In 1930, when Maharshi Shinde was imprisoned, the work of the Association was interrupted for some time. But then the activities were organised at different places; first at Shri V K Jog's place in Bhamburde and then at 'Ramvihar,' the bunglow of Maharshi Shinde. Thus, under the inspiring leadership of Maharshi Shinde, the Association was successful in disseminating liberal religious principles among various families and creating bonds of affection among them.

The Brahmo Samaj at Wai was established at the behest of Maharshi Shinde. First the Prarthana Sangh was established on 4 July, 1933. Shinde had visited this Sangh on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of the birth of Raja Ram Mohun Roy and the local organisers had conveyed to him that they were keen on calling this Sangh the Brahmo Samaj. Annasaheb agreed to this proposal on condition that at least five gentlemen agreed to becoming regular followers. This condition was fulfilled in due course and then onwards the Prarthana Sangh worked consistently. The constitution of the Brahmo Samaj was formally prepared. A Brahmo Mandir was also built and on 25 May, 1937, the temple entry function was organised. Shinde presided over this function. Two hours before the programme commenced, a family prayer was organised at the house of a Dhor[2] and the whole family took the deeksha of the Brahmo Samaj.

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[2] A low caste in Maharashtra. People of this caste are curriers and tanners.

Maharshi Shinde wanted the Brahmo Samaj to reach out to villages around Wai and disseminate the preaching of the Brahmo dharma there. The Wai Brahmo Samaj fulfilled his expectations. Maharshi Shinde himself toured villages such as Pachwad, Bhuinj, along with his colleagues. He used to frequently visit the localities of the untouchables in these villages. Thus he had organically combined his religious work with the task of eradication of untouchability. He was very keen on touring the villages. In a letter written on 16 October, 1936, to the Wai Prarthana Samaj, he says, "If you plan our programme properly, I and Keskar will be happy to come and tour the villages. Otherwise, I am not very keen on visiting just for holding some prayer sessions and eating sweets."

He insisted on women organising prayer sessions. In one of his letters, he commented, "If you can't find a woman to hold a prayer session, I will do it, but then I'll have to wear a sari, of course!"

The Wai Brahmo Samaj functioned very well under his guidance. His aim of disseminating liberal religious principles among rural populace was at least partially realised by them. In his terribly hectic life, the Wai Brahmo Samaj symbolized a watershed, a place of rest and relaxation, for him.

6

POLITICAL LIFE

Political work formed one of the major fields of engagement for Vitthal Ramji Shinde. But his basic frame of mind was essentially spiritualistic and this prevented his politics from being totally materialistic. Right from his childhood, he had a deeply ingrained passion for values like liberty and fraternity and abhorrence for any form of injustice. It was the moral and spiritual exigencies that prompted his entry into politics. His political work reflects both his independent way of thinking as well as his committment to equality.

The leaders of the Prarthana Samaj of Bombay were basically progressive but moderate. Yet there were several differences of opinion among them. Both Dr Bhandarkar and Gokhale were leaders of the moderates. But Dr. Bhandarkar insisted on making religion a base for all his political work whereas Gokhale was absolutely neutral as far as religion was concerned. He was more interested in politics. In spite of being a missionary of the Prarthana Samaj, Vitthal Ramji Shinde was keenly interested in politics. Sometimes Bhandarkar in a jocular vein used to say to him, "Ah, after all you're a disciple of Gokhale!" Shinde countered in an equally light vein, "Ah, but then Gokhale is your disciple! Then am I not like a grand-disciple of yours?" When there were strong differences between moderates like Bhandarkar and Gokhale, it was hardly surprising that Justice Chandavarkar and Lokamanya Tilak, leaders of the moderates and radicals respectively, were absolutely opposed to each other. Now Vitthal

Ramji Shinde wanted to both maintain good relations with all and work for the Prarthana Samaj and the eradication of untouchability. But his fine moral sense never deserted him nor did he ever indulge in any unethical and self-deluding practices. His political opinions were radical but he never hid them from others. When in 1907 Lokmanya Tilak was sentenced by the British Government to imprisonment and sent to Mandale, Shinde conducted prayers for his health and peace of mind.

The year 1916 represented a tumultous period in Indian politics. The Lucknow pact was made in order to bring Muslims and Hindus together. Lokamanya Tilak had taken initiative in bringing them together. Because of the pressure of the world war, there was a distinct possibility of the Indians getting some political rights from the British government. But though unity was the key note in national politics, the political scene in Maharashtra reverberated with the discordant notes of the growing strife between developed and backward castes, Brahmins and non-Brahmins, high castes and untouchable castes. The formation of the non-Brahmins party to bring together all non-Brahmin castes was imminent. Vitthal Ramji did not consider these developments favourably. In the public meeting at Amaravati, he declared, "This newly emerging Non-Brahmin philosophy will be detrimental to unity." Because of this atmosphere of division, there was some propaganda going on that the Maratha community and the Bahujan Samaj (lower caste) community were opposed to independence. Jedhe, an eminent Maratha leader was taking an anti-Brahmin stance through his Satyashodhak philosophy. After taking all these factors into consideration, Vitthal Ramji felt that the Maratha community, a majority community in Maharashtra, was almost like its backbone. Hence he wanted this community to be awakened, but without causing any division in the society. On the contrary, he wanted the spirit of unity to percolate down to the lowest levels of society, from brahmins to the untouchables.

And it was with this inspiring purpose in mind that the Maratha Rashtriya Sangha was established. He addressed the meeting of this Sangha, organized at the place of Shri Gobind Krishnaji Botre on 26 October, 1917. It was unanimously resolved to adopt a policy favourable to the National Congress and organize in Pune a huge rally of people of all castes, sects and religions, in order to support the plan of Home-rule, evolved jointly by the National Congress and the Muslim League in Lucknow. This rally was held on 8 November, 1917, on the ground in front of Shaniwarwada in which ten thousand people participated. Shinde presided over this rally. In his speech, he firmly stated that it was wrong to make a distinction between brahmins and non-brahmins and assured that the Maratha community was not, nor could it ever be, opposed to freedom. Such a possibility did not even exist, he said. Lokmanya Tilak also spoke in this meeting and warned against the entry of casteist sentiments into politics. He declared that the National Congress was not concerned with the interests of only one caste and assured the meeting that it would protect the interests of all castes.

Thus, the danger posed to the national freedom movement by the divisive caste politics, which sought to divide people into developed - undeveloped, Brahmin - non-Brahmin and Maratha - non-Maratha, was averted because of the efforts and leadership of Vitthal Ramji Shinde as far as the Maratha community was concerned. It may be said that, in a way, this work of Vitthal Ramji Shinde paved the way for the later involvement of the Maratha community and subsequently the non-Maratha community, in the National Congress.

Vitthal Ramji Shinde participated in the elections of 1920. But even here he demonstrated his independent approach. The elections were going to take place in the wake of the Montague-Chemesford reforms, in November 1920. Both parties in the Maratha community held a joint meeting in Jedhe Mansion in Pune and both parties suggested and supported the candidature of Annasaheb Shinde. The government had reserved seven seats for the Maratha community. Shinde firmly told both parties that he was not prepared to contest for a reserved seat as he was opposed to the communal principle inherent in it. He agreed to contest the election for a general open seat. In order to make clear his position to people, he published his election programme under the name of 'Bahujan Paksha' on 1 September, 1920. It was as follows :

The entire populance of India can be politically divided into two sections :

1. People who have progressed because of education or positions of authority, and
2. People who have remained backward because of lack of access to education or positions of authority.

This second section of people consists of the despised untouchables. The contradictions between these two sections have intensified with the commencement of political reforms and as a result, a new party of these undeveloped people has come into existence. This same party is also called the Non-Brahmin Party. Yet the two main characteristics of the undeveloped castes, viz. lack of power and helplessness, are not categorically reflected in its caste specific nomenclature 'Non-Brahmin.' Hence this new party, will be aptly called "Bahujan Paksha" (Majority Community Party) or "Janapad Paksha" (party of the common people); it will not leave any place for criticism of this kind and rule out any possibility of objections being raised.

Method of Work : As this party is based upon the solid foundation of committment to the downtrodden people, in order to protect the interests of the people, it will actively cooperate with any individual or any party which respects its equal status and which is also prepared to actively cooperate with it, as and when the need arises. The party includes the following sections of the society :

1. Peasant Class : A person who tills his own land or land taken on lease and who engages an adequate number of farm hands to assist him in the task and pays them equal and proper wages may be understood as a peasant. This class will absolutely not include landlords or Jagirdars who have inherited lands for generations.
2. Soldier Class : Our party must protect the interests of this class as they too are backward. The 'Kunbi' is the real caretaker of all of these and the big landlords and the Jagirdars are nothing but his wards. Similarly the lone soldier who fights bravely is the real "Kshatriya." He is never to be considered just a peon.
3. Teacher Class : This does not include the so-called sacred Brahmins, or priests or Joshis or other such idle exploiters. This class will include, irrespective of their caste, religion etc. those who are engaged in the task of teaching of literature or practical crafts and who are prepared to accept their wages at the going rate, without laying any claims to their traditional rights. The party must protect the interests of this class.
4. The Craftsman Class : All those uneducated people who serve the nation by engaing themselves in various crafts, such as 'sutars', (carpenters), 'sonars' (goldsmith), 'telis' (oil sellers), 'tambolis[1]', and yet who have never had any power, also have a right over the nation and their status is not a whit less than that of the peasants and the soldiers.
5. Shopekeepers : This class excludes those merchants who enrich themselves by borrowing capital from others and paying interest on it as well as people who have companies of their own. It is important to remember that there is a great need of capitalists who do not charge interest, for the nationwide distribution of the

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[1] Tamboli : sellers of betel leaf, areca-nut, tobacco etc.

wealth produced by the peasant and protected by the soldier. Our party must strive to protect the interests of this class as well provided that it does not exploit the downtrodden people.

6. Worker Class : It is possible to include in this class intellectuals such as doctors, lawyers, etc along with those that earn their living by manual labour. But this group of people is often found to accumulate excessive wealth and acquire positions of power in society with that wealth. Leadership of the downtrodden majority of people is often seen to go to him. These people, though in principle workers, are basically not undeveloped so it is better to let them take the responsibility of looking after their own interests. The remaining, real labouring workers will find that they do not have anybody to care for them except our party. Even if they grow ambitious, it will only be the Bahujan paksha which can reason with them.
7. The Class of Untouchables : This class of people is really undeveloped. It is the most sacred responsibility of this party to eradicate untouchability and helplessness; and it cannot be ignored under any pretext whatsoever such as religion, tradition or custom. It is the most sacred duty of this party to fight for their equality and assimilate them with the upper castes. Most of the earlier opportunities were wasted in futile debates, hypocratical resolutions and selfish sympathies and people from this class started deviating from the right path. So our party must remain vigilant all the time.
8. The Class of Women : The women of our country have achieved nothing in this current transformation that the society is undergoing. Our party is not a party of scholars, orators and howlers. So how can it forget the class of women? They are the cradle of humankind. We are fully aware that if we ignore them, we will all be buried in the cradle itself.

So far, we have merely presented a classification of different interests which can be observed in the society. But there are a few more which cannot be classified thus. There are several problems such as compulsory education, prohibition of liquor consumption, right to freedom of opinion in social and religious matters confronting our nation. But when the party, which claims to be "national," actually impedes them instead of solving them and those who call themselves reformists throw up their arms in despair, it is necessary for an independent and new party like ours to undertake the arduous task of awakening the downtrodden and making themselves self-reliant. We will not oppose those who are concerned with the well-being of the nation. We are hopeful that all of them will join hands with us, at least help us in our task."

Thus it may be seen that Shinde includes farmers, peons, teachers, artisans, shopkeepers, workers, labourers, untouchables and women in the downtrodden class. All those whom he strove to elevate from their exploited and impoverished situation, are thus specifically mentioned in his manifesto. In fact, his inclusion of both untouchables and women is quite a distinctive feature of this manifesto. It is difficult to think of any other party, either before or after him, which so valiantly championed the cause of the downtrodden and included it in the political, election manifesto.

In this election, Shri N C Kelkar was the candidate of the radicals, Sheth Manurkar was the candidate of the moderates and Shri Vasudeorao Gupte was an independent candidate who had the backing of His Highness Shrimant Shahu Chhatrapati.

Shahu Maharaj had offered to back Shinde against Shri N C Kelkar. In a meeting organised in Gul lane of Bhavani Peth, he was asked to speak on Shahu Maharaj's proposal to appoint a Kshatriya "Jagatguru." Shinde, who believed that there should be no intermediary between God and Man, expressed his reservations about this proposal. Bhaskarrao Jadhav, the next speaker, criticised his views and then this lead to a lot of debate. The meeting was disrupted. As a result, people backing Shinde were divided. Shahu Maharaj withdrew his support. As a result Vitthal Ramji Shinde lost the election.

He found a kindred spirit in Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji's philosophy and political thought, which was far more comprehensive and which had a strong spiritual base, deeply affected him. No other comtemporary political leader seems to have claimed so much respect from him as Mahatma Gandhi. As a natural consequence of this, he participated in the movement of civil disobedience of 1930. He was 57 years old at that time.

In the meantime, Shri Balukaka Kanetkar and Shri Haribhau Phatak approached Shinde with a request to provide leadership to this movement. Shri Keshavrao Jedhe also participated along with Shinde. Shinde toured all the villages in the Pune district on foot along with a batch of satyagrahis. These tours were quite remarkable. With traditional songs and public speeches, they appealed to the rural populace who extended them a very warm welcome and on their own, made arrangements for food. Batches of satyagrahis used to be sent off with some fanfare and Shinde presided over such functions a number of times with his wife, Rukminibai Shinde, giving them her blessings and coconuts.

His first tour was in Haveli taluka. Travelling on foot, he walked nearly a hundred miles and visited almost all the villages in this Taluka. Then he went into Khed Taluka. Here the Satyagrahis tried to sell salt and break the law. The earthen pots containing salt were brought from Dandi itself. The salt used to be auctioned off later through which considerable amount was collected. As it was summer, farmers used to flock to his meetings. At some meetings, more than 7000 people gathered. After the meeting, foreign cloth was brunt. The volunteers used to take a march through the village, singing, to attract people. Thus, this tour became like a kind of "Dindi" (procession) of the religious Warkaris. Shinde often spoke to the activists on various subjects such as the sacredness of their task, their responsibilities, the importance of suffering and endurance etc. In a sense this was a spiritual education of his volunteers through which he used to explicate the basic thesis of Mahatma Gandhi's thought.

His third tour was in the region of Bhimashankar. After the successful completion of the tour, two police officers, viz. Inspector Miller, from Pune city and District Inspector Shinde, were deputed to arrest him on 18 May, 1930. According to the Hindu Calender, it was the full moon day of the month of Vaishakha, a day of Buddha Jayanti as well. They arrived at 12 noon. He was taken by car to Khandala and then to the bungalow of Deputy Collector Shri Madhavrao Hullyal, his childhood friend, before whom he was presented. Hullyal treated him respectfully and sentenced him to six months' rigorous imprisonment. They had been together in Fergusson college. Once when Hullyal had fallen seriously ill, Shinde had nursed him without taking any rest. The whole account about this is narrated in his diary of 1898. And now the task of sentencing his friend befell on Hullyal and his wife could not control her tears.

Shinde was sent to the prison at Yerawada. On 1st July, 1930, Shri Bhaskarrao Jadhav, education minister of the then Bombay province, called on Shinde. He probably meant to release Shinde if he agreed not to participate in the movement. "You are old now," he told Shinde, "You need rest. And I have come to take you if you decide to rest." Shinde answered, "If rest is all I need, this is the very place to get it. And if people like us are here, then the commotion outside would somewhat lessen." What Bhaskarrao Jadhav was suggesting just did not suit his nature. He was too much a man of principle to accept such a suggestion.

Shinde utilised the time in the prison for writing his dairy and memoirs. His religious routine did not alter in the prison. He used to attend all the Catholic prayers and discussed Jainism with his Jain fellow prisoners. He spent a lot of time in spiritual meditation. He was released from prison on 14 October, 1930. The next day, a public meeting was organised in the Ray Market (Phule Market now) to felicitate him. When he was offered garlands, he commented wryly, "Now-a-days going to prison has become such a common thing that such garlands now should be offered to those who have never been to a prison rather that to those who have been there."

7

OTHER EFFORTS FOR REFORM

Though propagation of liberal monotheistic religion and abolition of untouchability was the essence of Maharshi Shinde's work, he also undertook analogous efforts for social reform.

Movement for Abolition of the Murali Custom[1] :- His efforts for the abolition of the inhuman Murali custom of offering young girls from untouchable castes to gods and goddesses form a major part of such work. His attitude as liberal reformer had already been formed in his student life. When he was studying in Pune, he went to his village in 1893 and brought home a girl of about seven years of age from an untouchable caste for reform at his home. His parents, too, treated the girl as their own daughter. The girl grew up and later became a teacher in a school for untouchable girls at Jamkhandi.

The Murali custom forced girls into an immoral and hard life. When he began his work of abolition of untouchability, his attention was drawn to the problems of such unfortunate girls. He wrote an article in 1907 on these girls on the basis of the statistics in the census of the period between 1891 and 1901. These girls, known as Murali, Jogti, Bhavin, Basvi, Devdasi were offered to gods like Khandoba, Ambabai, Dareshwar, Guddyamma etc at places such as Jejuri, Tulajapur, Kumta, Sirsi, Saundatti. He gave a detailed placewise account of such offerings. There is a custom of offering boys as well as girls. They are called by the names of Waghya, Aradhya, Potraj, Jogtya. Vitthal Ramji Shinde endeavoured to abolish this terrible custom that prohibited children from living a healthy life and pushed them into a life of immorality. He made efforts to contain this custom by establishing the Institute for Protecting Children in Western Hindustan. Eminent people like Justice Chandawarkar, Sir Bhalchandra Krishna, H R H Wilkinson were the members of the executive council of this institute. Shinde himself worked as the secretary. Dr Mann also helped him in this respect. The institute had also employed two inspectors on a salary of 60 rupees per month. He convened a conference on Murali Prohibition in Mumbai in 1911. His sister Janabai also helped him in his efforts. She nursed and cured an infected girl from Khadki and then married her off to a gentleman from Hyderabad. It can categorically be said that Maharshi Shinde was the first reformer to make efforts to abolish this monstrous custom and help these hapless girls live a new and better life.

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[1] Murali Custom : An old custom in Hindus whereby a low caste young Hindu girl is offered to God Khandoba. Most of these girls later on spend their lives as sex workers.

The Vulgar Custom of Shimga (Holi) :- The festival of Shimga was observed in an extremely indecent and vulgar manner eighty years ago. He made efforts to abolish this custom that spoiled individual morality of the Hindus and encouraged indecent social behaviour. He tried to dissuade people from participating in this custom by organising a public meeting on the grounds of the Globe Mill in Mumbai in 1907. He gave more attention to this movement from 1913 onwards and tried to give a better form of Holi to Shimga by organising entertainment programmes and adventurous sports in schools.

Compulsory Education for Girls : - Around 1918-19, the Pune Municipality was thinking of making education compulsory for boys. Vitthal Ramji Shinde did not like the idea of depriving girls of compulsory primary education. On the day when a general meeting of the Municipality was called, he organised a huge procession of women through the city. A procession of high caste women led by Ramabai Ranade, the wife of Justice Ranade, that started from Seva Sadan and the procession of untouchable women that had started from Ahalyashram, came together in front of the Municipality office. The Municipality meeting had to be adjourned that day to gauge public opinion on this matter. A meeting was held under the chairmanhip of Shri Shankarrao Bhagwat in Kirloskar theatre. Lokmanya Tilak opposed compulsory education for girls. And the meeting had to be abandoned because of the resultant pandemonium. Maharshi Shinde wrote a series of articles in *Dyanaprakash*, arguing for compulsory education for girls. As a consequence of this movement, Wrangler Paranjape passed the act of compulsory education when he became the education minister. Because of this act, compulsory education for girls began along with boys in cities that had municipalities.

Peasant Movement :- Improving the wretched conditions of peasants was a major subject of concern in Maharshi Shinde's later work. He did important work of creating awareness among peasants by organising meetings and conference during the period between 1926 and 1932. He had also mentioned peasantry as an oppressed class in the electoral programme of the Bahujan party.

This period between 1926 and 1932 was in fact charged with the struggle for freedom. Shinde had personally participated in it and was also imprisoned. In spite of these hardships, he strongly advocated his objective views in the true interests of peasantry. His genuine concern for this class transparently comes through his work. He made an objective analyis of the peasant's problems and suggested his own solutions in the various Agricultural Conferences, namely, the Agricultural Conference of the Untouchables (1926, Pune), Mumbai Province Peasant Conference (1928, Pune), Walwa Taluka Peasant Conference (1931, Borgaon), Conference of the Peasants of the Princely States' (1932, Terdal) and Chandawad Taluka Peasant Conference (1932, Wadner). He analysed the peasants' relations with the British Government, the Princes of States, landlords, the Congress party and the industrial workers. He did get angry to see injustice done to peasants but he never allowed these feelings to cloud his judgement. He considered the organisation of the conference of untouchables as a mere show. The untouchables, according to him, were neither peasants nor agricultural labourers. In the south, peasant is treated as a slave who can be sold like cattle along with the land. By making the untouchables aware that they were the original masters of the Dandakaranya, he called upon them "to unite and regain the ownership they had lost over the land."

Shinde purposefully attended the peasants' conference in Pune when he was on his way to attend the centenary celebrations of the Brahmo Samaj at Calcutta because it had a religious significance for him. He explained to the peasants the selfish motives of the British government behind its decision to force the Enhancement of Land Revenue Bill and the Consolidation of Small Holdings Bill on the peasants. He could see through the plan of the British government to exploit the helpless Indian peasants and labourers. He suggested a plan whereby lands from rich farmers could be claimed by the government for distribution among the small farmers instead of paying them in cash for their land. He agreed that this scheme would not be without problems, yet he considered it more just. The government's scheme of collecting money from farmers through increase in land revenue for capital intensive projects such as Backbay Development or Sakkar dam was like robbing Peter to pay Paul. He argued that the land bill was intended solely for easy collection of land revenue.

In fact he made a novel suggestion to the government by proposing that land revenue could be collected in the form of grains rather than money.

In the peasant's conference at Borgaon, he defined a peasant in a fundamental way : "I think a peasant is one who owns land which is adequate enough for the maintainance of his family and dependents, for their education and other comforts. He cultivates that land himself with their help. Those who do not do this, or claim excess land are capitalists. A peasants' organization has to be against the government."

In the same speech, he urged the rural peasants and industrial workers to unite. In a forthright manner, he argued for a combined organization of peasants and workers to combat and defeat capitalism in a country like India and warned them that they could not depend in this endeavour on the Congress as it constituted the future parliament of India and hence would protect the interests of the capitalists like any government.

He argued that a farmer should not only produce but should consciously think of the economics of production as well. "You should not be just tiller of the land. You must keep one hand free for production and the other for reigning in the bullocks of the economic cart."

Shinde's analysis of the peasants' problems is relevant even today.

8

RESEARCH AND WRITING

Maharshi Vitthal Ramji Shinde had devoted his entire life for religious and social work. Yet the amount of work he produced by way of research and writing is amazing. Undoubtedly, it was his deep commitment to the search for truth, and genuine interest in subjects like sociology, religion, history and comparative philology that made work possible.

As has already been stated, he had spent his early childhood in Jamkhandi and was enriched by both Marathi and Kannada cultures. He had travelled over half of Europe and studiously observed the conditions there. He had journeyed all over India several times and had critically observed the conditions of life in the various provinces. Fired by the spirit of universal brotherhood and free of any prejudices and biases regarding the superiority or inferiority of any culture, his research and writing bear the stamp of his minute and keen observation and great scholarship.

A series of five essays on "Bhagwat Dharmacha Vikas", (the Development of Bhagawat Religion) that he wrote following his lectures on the same topic in 1925, formed an introduction to his proposed History of Religion. In these essays he had traced the development of the Bhakti principle from ancient to modern times with convincing evidence. The established tradition of research before him tended to view Indian culture as Aryan culture and was based on the belief that the pre-Aryan culture in India had been backward and underdeveloped and the Aryan culture was superior to the pre-Aryan culture.

Maharshi Shinde rejected these beliefs and demonstrated how the influence of the pre-Aryan culture was discernible in the Indian culture in various different forms. He argued that the principle of Yoga and Bhakti had existed in the pre-Aryan culture and presented several instances from a recently published research on Mohenjodaro in support of his contention. Making a distinction between Veidic Dharma and Bhagwata Dharma, he described the Veidic Dharma as material religion and the Bhagawata Dharma as ethical. According to him, Bhakti is not really related to the Veidic Dharma. He argued that the word "Bhagawata", was derived from "bhaga" (meaning 'hole') and argued that "Devi Bhagawata" was the worship of Devi/Shakti. Classifying the Bhagwata religion into five branches, viz. 'Devi', 'Shiva', 'Buddhist', 'Jain' and 'Vishnu' Bhagawata, he examined their interrelations. In the course of time, he argued, the Buddhist religion disappeared from India, Jainism gradually stunted and the other sects degenerated. He demonstrated how the Maharashtra Bhagawata Dharma, i.e. the 'Warkari' sect at Pandharpur revived and reformed the Hindu religion. He concluded by discussing how the Lingayat Dharma from the South, Sikhism of the North, Chiatanya's Vaishnawa Dharma from the East had contributed to the reformation of the Hindu religion.

In 1905, he delivered a lecture before the Social Reform Association on the state of untouchables in which he quoted information from the 1901 Government Census Report about the state, nature, names, institutions of untouchables in India and also cited his own observations from his travels all over India. This lecture was later on published in the journal Indian Social Reformer and it may be considered as the first major research article on untouchables in India. His thesis "The Problem of Indian Untouchability" written from a sociological perspective was published in 1933. This may be called the first thesis on the subject. In this thesis, Maharshi Shinde had traced the history of the origin and development of untouchability and its forms from the Veidic period to the present age. For this, he discussed several factors such as the etymology of their names, their religion, social situation and politics etc. The wealth of information presented and the conclusions drawn from this information were path breaking in their potential.

He proposed that untouchability had probably originated in the pre-Aryan culture, especially in "Abhicharmulaka Apadharma." According to him, the evidence from India and Brahamadesh ('Myanmar' today) indicated that the untouchables of today had been rulers in the past. He opined that the untouchables were followers of Buddhism and quoted evidences from the songs, names and folktales of tribals from Orissa in support of this contention. Later on, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar developed this argument extensively and supported it with several other types of evidence. His tremendous commitment to the investigation of the problem of untouchability and to the improvement in the conditions of the untouchables is evident from the following remarks made by him :

> "I cannot say with conviction whether I'll be successful in the task of eradication of untouchability. But one thing I'm absolutely sure about. This work of investigating into the problem itself has accorded me such immense pleasure that I will devote all my future births, if there are any such things, to the study of the same problem and to the service of the same people."

He published three articles on the history of the Marathas from the perspective of comparative anthropology in the magazine *Ratanakar* in 1929-30. He proposed that the Marathas do not constitute a caste; they actually constitute a nation and are a famous race. He demonstrated how the word Maratha is actually related to "Ratta", "Raj" and "Ratha" and quoted the work, *History of the Parthians* by the renowned anthropologist Rollinson in support of his contention that the Marathas belonged either to the "Parthav" or the "Pallav" race.

Like his anthropological work, his research on comparative philology also is significant. In his essay written in 1923, "The Interrelationship of Kannada and Marathi" he showed that the influence of Kannada on Marathi is not limited only to the lexis but also extends to the grammar of Marathi. He carried out a comparative study of Konkani and Marathi and showed that Konkani was a dialect of Marathi. He had an independent theory regarding the evolution of Marathi, that Marathi had not evolved from the Prakrita Maharashtri but had travelled all the way from Magadha, through Bengal, Orissa, Telangana, Vidarbah and North Karnataka between Krishna and Godawari, to Maharashtra.

Maharshi Shinde dealt with any social problem in a systematic way. He first tried to examine its historical formation and then went on to delineate what shape it would take in future. His thinking was always value-oriented. That is why his discussion of social problems such as untouchability or the problems of farmers is invaluable. He felt that the unity of Brahmins, Marathas and the Untouchables was a necessary condition for the proper development of Maharashtra. He wanted the Maharashtra University being founded at Pune to include colleges from Sangli, Kolhapur and Dharwad and proposed that colleges from Karnataka be given choice to opt for either Marathi or Kannada as the medium of instruction. This was, he believed, the way Marathi could repay the debt of the Kannada language. He wanted schools to be like extended families where students developed comradeship amongst themselves and he believed that imparting spiritual instruction was the ultimate goal of education. In his address delivered as chairman of the session on philosophy and sociology in the Sahitya Sammelan at Vadodara in 1935, he regretfully observed that Marathi had no independent philosophical work to boast of, that the hoards of books produced were nothing but a rigmarole of commentaries and that most of the written discourse in the later years revolved around the centre of the Bhagwat Gita.

From the year 1901, when he went to England, he used to write for *Subodha Patrika,* the organ of Prarthana Samaj. After his return, he wrote several articles, delivered several lectures and preached sermons on various themes. All of these are published collectively in the book *Vitthal Ramji Shinde Yanche Lekh Vyakhyane wa Upadesh.* (The Writings, Lectures and Sermons of Vitthal Ramji Shinde). His educational, religious, research writings as well as the lectures delivered by him in his later life, are published in the book *Shinde Lekha Sangraha* (A Collection of Writings by Shinde).

His books *Mazya Athawani ani Anubhava* (My Memories and Experiences) and the *Rojnishi* (Diary) contain the notes from the diaries he had kept at different periods in his life such as - his student days in the Fergusson college at Pune (1898), his stay in England (1901-1903) and his imprisonment in the Yerawada jail (1930). They are autobiographical writings. He had started writing his book *Mazya Athawani ani Anubhava* during his days in the Yearwada jail but then he completed the manuscript later on, when he was suffering from Parkinson's disease towards the end of his life. The first section of this book is an intensely beautiful expression of his sensitivity. The recounting of his childhood reminiscences of their poverty, of his loving mother is especially touching. Maharshi Shinde was not averse to humour. In fact his writing often has subtle humour. Yet the autobiographical writing is totally free of any self congratulatory or complaining tone. His mature, forgiving personality vibrantly comes through his writing.

His Diary also is no exception to this. His diary written during his Fergusson days is a critical commentary on the religious, social, political aspects of institutional life in Pune towards the fag end of the nineteenth century, as seen by a rational, considerate and humane intellectual. It is an expression of a sensitive and religious thinker. His critical comments on the various contemporary events in Pune such as public lectures, newspapers, movements etc reveal his independent and unbiased judgement. His diary in England reveals his perceptive comments on the scenic splendour in Europe, its industrial civilization, democratic set up, religious institutions, educational system, social and family life and social welfare institutions. And above all, his subtle sense of humour lends his writing a lively touch. The account of his participation in the prayer in the Glassgo Cathedral is an instance of his inimitable style :

> "As usual, I was received with great honour today. The credit goes to my 'Pheta', as usual! I was placed right in the front row. Some Bishop, (he was at Madras some years ago), delivered the sermon today. He made a special mention of India and even of my name, in his speech. I thanked my turban, of course!"

Similarly while describing a woman called Mademoiselle Duga in Paris, he said,

> "The lady is of singularly simple habits. Everything about her - her dress, her demeanour - is so simple, gentle and modest that she is not fit to live in Paris."

His diary written during his stay in London also reveals his spiritualistic frame of mind, religious values, deep sense of commitment to the welfare of people as well as his aesthetic sensibility. He was fifty seven when he was imprisoned in the Yearwada jail. And he had attained a rare maturity and equanimity which went beyond any personal feelings of grouse and animosity. He had participated in the freedom struggle under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership with the same equanimity. Naturally his prison diary also reveals the same lovely personality, which was a rare mixture of philosophical objectivity and lyrical sensibility. Above all, his fine sense of humour comes scintillatingly through in all his writing.

Marashi Shinde's style goes beyond mere factual descriptions of nature, human beings or philosophical discourses. His writing combines both rationality and sensitivity and is characterized by the native Marathi vigour which is spoilt neither by excessive ornateness nor by the undue influence of English or Sanskrit.

9

CONCLUSION

Vitthal Ramji Shinde began to suffer from rheumatism towards the end of 1933. The medical examination revealed that he was suffering from diabetes as well. As if this was not enough, he also started suffering from Parkinson's disease. As a result of all these ailments, his social activities came to a standstill. For almost eleven years after this, till his death on 2 January, 1944 in Pune, he suffered like Bhishmacharya[1] in Mahabharata.

His life was a saga of a devoted spirit. He had decided at a very early age that he would live an ascetic life and devote himself to religious work. His deep sense of commitment to this work was coupled with a profound moral sense. That is why he was able to devote his whole life to the dissemination of liberal religious thought and eradication of untouchability, which he considered to be a blot on human dignity.

Several people, greatly impressed by his sacrificing nature, sense of commitment and inspiring vision, joined him in his endeavour. His family was with him.

His visionary insight is reflected in his very perception of untouchability in an age which was completely impervious to this evil social practice. His decision to awaken the whole country to the evils of this custom also reveals his comprehensive perspective.

In the conference of social reformers in 1914, while commenting on the charge that the newly awakened people among the untouchables criticize social reformers a lot, he had said,

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[1] Bhishmacharya had to lie on a bed of arrows for a long time before his death.

> "If the pan is too hot, a little water thrown on it will turn into steam and scorch the hands of the man who had thrown the water. It is so with the untouchables as well. This community has been oppressed so much that if some attempts are made for their welfare, instead of being mollified, the untouchables are enraged by the inadequacy of the efforts. Therefore, they should not be blamed. On the contrary, we should be sensitive to their miserable plight as untouchables and shower sympathy and help of all kind over them."

Who can say that the speaker of these words was not saint? He had to endure a lot of misunderstanding and discontent of the very people for whom he had devoted the most precious years of his life. Yet when he saw that capable people from the untouchables were coming up, he quietly entrusted the work of the institution into their hands and stepped out. But he never lost his poise and judgement. Such behaviour in social life can be possible only by people with a deeply religious commitment.

Though dissemination of religious philosophy and eradication of untouchability were the prime tasks of his life, he also devoted considerable energies to the problems of peasants and women. His efforts in this regard are significant even today when movements against oppression of women and for the improvement of peasants lives are undertaken on a considerably larger scale. That Maharshi Shinde regarded these problems as urgent 75 years ago and worked for them is an evidence of his visionary insight.

The distinctiveness of his vision and work appears to be even more so if it is placed in the context of the various social, religious and political movements in Maharashtra, from the middle of the nineteenth century to 1947, when

India attained independence. This period, spanning over a hundred years, is characterized by the significant attempts made by Mahatma Jotiba Phule, Justice Ranade, Principal Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, Gopal Krushna Gokhale, Lokmanya Tilak, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar towards the reorganization of the social, religious and political life of Maharashtra. All these stalwarts had their own perspectives for which they worked. Maharshi Shinde was different from all of them in that his work represented an organic synthesis of all perspectives which were beneficial for the reorganization of the entire society. He disseminated high religious knowledge and attempted religious reforms without attacking any section of the society. He did not want his religious thought to remain in the narrow precincts of urban life but wanted it to reach the millions living in the villages of India. Similarly, his thoughts on social reforms were not restricted only to a particular section of the society. They encompassed all sections from the untouchables to women and from the rural to the urban people. He never lost his love for freedom even when he was working for religious and social reforms. His work for the erradication of untouchability had a wider, human perspective. He did not propose to make any one particular religion stronger. He never opposed one class while trying to ameliorate the conditions of the other. On the contrary, he always sought to bring them together on one level. He could not endure the divisive tendencies reflected in caste lables such as touchables - untouchables, Brahmins - Non-Brahmins, Marathas - Non-Marathas etc. He wanted to eliminate all such divisions in the society and strove to unify it.

Thus Maharshi Shinde's life and work appear to be unique in that they represent the inclusion and synthesis of all perspectives which were useful for his work. This, of course, does not mean that he just picked up whatever he considered good on the intellectual level and used it conveniently. This has a deeper significance. In a sense, this synthesis owes its origin to his personality itself. We have already looked at the course of development of his personality. Even if he came under the influence of some thought for some time, he could still listen to his inner voice and manage to liberate himself from the influence, as is indicated by his being an atheist for a brief period in his college life. It seems that he took some very important decisions in his life by listening to this inner voice. His independence and honesty were rare indeed. Though very sensitive by nature, he never allowed his sentiments to interfere in his judgement and understanding of even those people with whom he had serious differences of opinion. This can be particulary seen in his writing on Lokmanya Tilak and Rajarshi Shahu. It is this frank and candid attitude which has lent his research and writing on untouchability and other linguistic and social subjects a rare objectivity. Just as he stated his differences of opinions with others forthrightly, he was unstinting in his appreciation where it was due. His personality had neither the excesses of eccentricism nor the traces of hypocrisy. That is why he could enlist the help of people from all sections of society, such as the leaders of the upper castes and the untouchables, materialists and spiritualists, moderates and radicals in politics, Indian Princes and British officials, in the task of eradication of untouchability.

How successful was Maharshi Shinde in the stupendous task that he had undertaken? Can we really apply the yard stick of popularity while assessing his success? He was not intransigent in his opinions, but he never made compromises either. In his politics, he was a staunch and independent radical. That is why, he lost the affinity of the great moderates in the Mumbai Prarthana Samaj and the extreme radicals for whom politics was everything, never really considered him a close ally. Because he never indulged in casteist politics, the Marathas never considered him as their own and because he launched attacks on dogmatic orthodoxy as a Bahujan Paksha member, he remained an outsider for the orthodox people and the

Brahmins. Even the leaders of the untouchables, eager to acquire control over the big institution of the Mission, did not want him. But his vision was wide-ranging and all encompassing. He wanted to work on the principle of unity. It may be said that it was because of these qualities that he did not get much popularity.

It is difficult to measure his success as the task he had undertaken was extremely arduous. Whatever question he was addressing—be it religious feelings, or untouchability or political problems, his task was basically to change the hearts of people and their moral conduct. That he dedicated his whole life for such a formidable task itself is an indication of his greatness. The failure of such people is more grand than their success.

Appendix-A

A Mission For The Depressed Classes
A Plea*

(By V. R. Shinde)

I do not wish to go into the historical origin of the Depressed Classes in India; nor should I relate, even if I could, the sad tale of their sufferings which is as old as Hinduism itself. It is again hardly needful to say that the term *Depressed Classes* does not include the comparatively blessed human beings, herds of whom are still defiantly standing outside the pale of civilization in India and are partaking with beasts and birds in the romance of the natural life. The Depressed Classes of India are unique on the face of the earth and in the history of humanity. They have their distinct place and function in the body politic of civilized India though the most unenviable one. By a strange sociological action they have been riveted at the outer gate of civilization from which they can neither proceed in or recede away. In Sociology, it is said, the unfit races become extinct as the unfit species in Biology. But these ill-fated people in India seem to be deprived of the very freedom of extinction; for they have been granted from days of the old legislators and builders of the Hindu Society a place at the very bottom of the hierarchical structure of castes and thereby a sort of fitness enough to live and propagate, with their own rights to the situation on which no one will trespass. Tradition tells us "In the time of Sidh Raj (1094-1143) the king ordered that a Dhed named Mayo should be beheaded in the Sahashra-Ling tank, at Patan in order that it might hold water." This tradition aptly illustrates the great sacrifice of the whole of this unlucky race so that the great tank-of-thousand signs of casto may hold water in India. The least effort to breathe a life of freedom in these slaves of ages and to raise them from their prostrate condition, is likely to shake the whole structure above them. No wonder then such a risk has never been even entertained till now.

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* V. R. Shinde read a paper on "Elevation of the Depressed Classes" before Indian Social Reform Association which was published in the Indian Social Reformer of 10 December 1905. In continuation of the same theme and to stress the need for establishing a native mission, he published this article in August 1906 and circulated it through the Brahm Postal Mission of the Bombay Prarthana Samaj.

A Brahmo friend in South Canara, who is trying hard to be friend these people, wrote to me a few months back, "Sir, Panchamas of this place are a miserable class. They are as a class day labourers taking as a rule one meal a day and relieving their hunger at midday by drinking *toddy*. They own no lands and are mere tenants-at-will under unsympathetic higher-caste land lords." This friend has been maintaining for some years past a school for the children of these people at a heavy cost; but whatever education he may give to these children of misfortune, he is not likely to wash away the stain of low caste from their faces and the greatest difficulty he feels in his work is to find for his pupils even the humblest opening in life out of their degraded situation. He therefore writes in utter despair "all my attempts to get even a single youth appointed as a peon have failed. Even the European officials do not like to incur the displeasure of their native subordinates. Once a sympathetic District Judge passed an order on a Pancham candidate's application for a peon's post that the first vacancy occurring in the department should be given to him. A vacancy did occur but the peons in the department about a hundred in number, made it a common cause to oppose the poor Pancham youth, went in a body to the Judge's bunglow and prostrated themselves before his honour, begging that they should not be disgraced by admitting into their ranks such an untouchable creature." Such is the deliberate depression these people are undergoing from times unknown, and without the slightest sign of revolt.

Yet this evil, however acute in its incidence and long standing in its history might not claim the serious attention of a practical patriot who is bent upon the advancement of the country at large, if the victims were a few individuals or groups of individuals in this or that corner of this great country. But the

Census Reports* have long revealed beyond doubt the appallingly vast numbers of these classes in every part of India. Estimating roughly the total population of India to be 300 millions there are more than 45 millions of these belonging to the Depressed Classes. In every seven Indians therefore, including coolies as well as kings, there is one wretched untouchable creature that hardly dares come within speaking distance except to do the meanest service to the rest.

Brahmans	1,48,93,258;	4.7 per cent.	of 291,36,056 Total
Low castes	4,56,99,260;	15 per cent.	Population of India

Comparative percentage of the Highest and the Lowest Castes in the total Hindu population of India.

	Ethnic Tracts in India	*Brahman*	*Depressed*
I	Indo-Aryan (The Punjab Rajputana etc.)	12	18
II	Seythio Dravidian (Bombay, Baroda and Coorg)	6	17
III (a)	Dravidian (Madras, Mysore, Hyderabad etc.)	4	25
(b)	Dravidian (Chotanagpure)	3	53
(c)	Dravidian (Central Provinces)	8.5	16
IV (a)	Aryo Dravidian (The United Provinces)	13	16
(b)	Aryo Dravidian (Behar)	50	21
V (a)	Mongolo Dravidian (Bengal)	6	7
(b)	Mongolo Dravidian (Orrissa)	10	5
VI	Mongoloid (Assam, Sikkim, Kuchbehar and etc.)	3	2

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* Extracted from the statistics on the main castes in India according to the Census of 1901. (Page 551).

Chamars	1,11,37,362	Holiyas	7,70,899
Mochis	10,07,812	Mangs	12,81,252
Doms	9,77,020	Mahars	20,28,666
Bhangis	6,56,586	Pariahs & other Depressed Classes	2,69,39,657
		Total	4,56,99,260

		Ethnic Tracts	*Untouchable Population*	*The Total Hindu Population*
I		Indo Aryan	36,38,745	1,97,31,592
II		Seythio-Dravidian	34,79,081	1,67,34,952
III	(a)	Dravidian (Madras)	1,53,74,073	5,26,26,366
	(b)	Dravidian (Chota Nagpur)	39,37,799	64,00,360
	(c)	Dravidian (Central Provinces)	23,45,210	1,33,32,398
IV	(a)	Ary-Dravidian (United Provinces)	1,00,48,858	4,06,49,391
	(b)	Ary-Dravidian (Bihar)	41,16,083	1,89,88,703
V	(a)	Mongolo-Dravidian (Bengal)	15,45,217	1,77,21,080
	(b)	Mongolo-Dravidian (Orissa)	11,06,793	37,66,527
VI		Mongoloid (Assam and etc.)	1,07,368	4,82,600
		Total	4,56,99,260	19,04,33,939

Total Untouchables	4,56,99,260
Total Hindus	19,04,33,969
Total Indians	29,43,61,956

No other caste in the country even approaches in number the total of these miserable out-castes. A clear seventh of this great section of humanity in the world is thus arbitrarily condemned as unfit to take part in any decent and clean service of mankind. Apart from the sin and shame of the situation, what an economical blunder perpetrated through ages down! Foreign invasions, political revolutions, religious reforms and social evolutions have rolled over this great continent and yet on this day of the 20th century not one of these 45 millions of untouchables can be openly touched without "pollution"!

We thus see the profound depth of this national evil and this national sin, and also its extent both in history and in the country at present.

The Christian Missions

While thinking on this subject one should never forget to do honour to the Christian Missions in this country by expressing one's genuine thanks for what they have done for these people. Christianity, inspite of its superannuated dogmas and the occasional defects in the spirit and method of its propagation is yet far more a living religion and a giver of the bread of life, than any other. If we take for example the district of Ahmadnagar, we see its marvellous results. Nearly one fifth of the population of the District town of Ahmadnagar are Christians, and more than 90 per cent of these converts must have come from the Depressed Classes in the district to claim the educational facilities and enjoy the blessings of civilized life in the city. This elevation of these people it must be admitted, is not an unmixed blessing, for it introduces into the body politic an alien element disturbing the growing unity of the Nation, although the higher caste Hindus have none but themselves to thank for this disturbing element. The Christian Missions however are under the inevitable disadvantage of being foreign : and even these people lowest as they are in the scale of the Hindu Society show a remarkable reluctance to accept the betterment at this cost, unless under a dire stress of material want.

The State

The state also affords special encouragement for the education of the Depressed Classes. But the educational system whether under the control of the Government or of the Municipalities is after all an inadequate means for the actual elevation of these people in as much as such a system is in its very nature bound to be purely mechanical and impersonal. In the report of the Director of Public Instruction of Bombay for the year 1904-05 there is a candid confession, "The Inspector while pointing out that considerable progress has been made in providing for the education of these special castes, points out that too often little care is taken, especially by Municipal Boards, to see that the teachers of schools are competent. With the opening of a free school, the Board feel that their duty has been done, but in time and with the encouragement of Scholarships the castes may provide their own masters which will be a great gain to the communities." But to do all this efficiently, is required a personality behind the machinery, full of initiative, purpose, benevolent enterprise and wakeful supervision, or in aword, of missionary fire—which is naturally out of question in the case of a merely official agency. No wonder then that we find so meagre a result in proportion to the power and resources of these agencies and that there is yet hardly one boy attending school in every hundred of the depressed population in the Bombay Presidency. "In the Census Report of 1901 a list is given of 31 castes which are regarded an unclean. The total number of persons belonging to them is not shown but the largest group consisting of Dheds, Mahars and Holias contains about $1^1/_3$ million persons." The total number of pupils of these castes in the Presidency attending school in 1905 was 15,058.

The Education of the Depressed Class in the Bombay Presidency in 1905

Division	*No. of pupils*	*Of these in the secondary schools*	*Those in Technical schools*	*Of schools and Classes*
Northern	5,113	33	0	156
Central	7,495	120	31	64+17
Southern	2,354	30	4	20+14
Sind	85	0	0	
Kathewad	11	0	0	
Total	15,058	198	35	280

An Apparently Hopeless Problem

The situation is now clear before us. More than forty-five millions i.e., more than 1/7th of the population of this vast country is depressed beyond any immediate hope! Not only the habitual material poverty but the moral degradation and above all the incubus of social disabilities make these people on the whole worse than the worst section of the civilized humanity in any part of the globe. Who fill up the gangs of dacoits in the ever recurring Indian famines? Who supply the cheap market of prostitution in large cities and especially near great military stations? Some slums in the western countries may equal these people in this material and moral wretchedness but who will equal them in their inexorable social disabilities? In spite of the power and benevolence of Christianity and the British Government, only 183 pupils are attending the secondary schools out of $1^1/_3$ million in the Presidency and not a single soul has yet passed that stage of education to the higher one. But the real painfulness of the problem does not lie in the paucity of pupils of this community but in the iron bar of caste which shuts even these few from all fair opportunities in life, so long as they care to remain Hindus! It seems therefore at first sight a hopeless task! These people might be left to their own fate and any new attempt appears to be out of question! But it was not my object to drive one to this dreary conclusion. On the other hand the situation before us will, I trust, inspire all living sons of India to a new attempt.

Wanted A Native Mission

What is wanted therefore is not merely a machinery of education however grand but a real mission i.e., an organization in which the personal element presides over and energizes the mechanism; and secondly, which is still more essential, a mission which is not exotic but indigenous or in other words a mission which is bent upon working an evolution but not a revolution, as Christian Missions are, in the religion, traditions, and social life of these people. In this respect I may appropriately allude to the most satisfactory result of the four Olcott Pancham Free Schools in Madras, started about ten years ago by Col. Olcott, the President Founder of the Theosophical Society and having at present on their rolls a total of 629 boys. The Lady Superintendent in her last year's reports says "In the detailed statistical report for the school year of 1905 the total per cent of passes in the Government examination for the Lower Primary Department of our four schools collectively was shown to be 95 per cent, or 20 per cent above the average of all the schools in the Presidency." What personal effort can do is still more clearly seen when one reads in the Lady Superintendent's reports 'I personally took the responsibility of sending two little girls who had completed the fourth standard to a Government School teaching the higher grades. They have both just completed the First Form with great credit to themselves. The parents of one of these girls were making arrangements for her marriage last year. Now after the experience of this year, the girl refuses to marry just yet (she is only thirteen) and is eagerly anxious to continue her education." Here is a mission working on evolutionary and not revolutionary lines.

In Conclusion

The question may be asked if what is being done in Madras for the Panchamas may not be as well attempted in Bombay for the Mahars and othes. Here, let us confine our attention to the situation in our own presidency.* The operations may possibly be best begun from the capital city. The city of Bombay in my humble opinion is the fittest centre for such work. Here there is the Prarthana Samaj already doing whatever is in its power by way of night schools for these people. There is also another active body of liberal principles viz. the Presidency Social Reform Association, which will do well to cooperate with the Samaj in this matter. In a paper read before this Association and published in the *Indian Social Reformer* of 10 December 1905, I described the work of some Associations among the Depressed Classes themselves inspired with the most hopeful and healthy spirit of self-help.

With some personal experience among the Depressed Classes of this city, I have every hope that with a little encouragement from the higher castes a similar association may be started here. A secondary day school with a small free boarding house for the mofussil low caste students, will serve as a good nucleus of a regular mission for these classes. The teachers of this school may be so selected and trained that they would also do the pastoral work among the homes of these people. And what are only school premises on week-days may be turned on Sundays into a place of morning worship of the most simple unsectarian character in which the pupils and the people in the neighbourhood may take part, and of evening lectures on moral and other subjects of general interest. On public holidays the same premises may be utilized as a centre for the meetings of the Association of the depressed communities in the neighbourhood, who will be constantly encouraged by the school authorities towards efforts of self-improvement. Further particulars of the mission—work need not be detailed here, for it will develop only after an actual beginning is made. The Prarthana Samaj of Bombay is the only Liberal Religious body in this Province that can, if it will, undertake this noble mission and carry it to its ultimate consummation viz. restoring at least such of

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* Social grouping of the Seytho Dravidian Tract, (Bombay, Baroda and Coorg)

Brahmans	1200431	6 per cent	of 20,487,619 Total Hindu population of the Tract
Kshatriyas	2183719	10 per cent	
Lingayets	1422293	7 per cent	
The Depressed	3479084	17 per cent	

these depressed souls, as are capable to their rightful, though long-withheld place in a renovated Hindu Society. But the Prarthana Samaj being an extremely small body is unable to bear the tremendous financial burden of such a mission. It is therefore the duty of every philanthropically and patriotically disposed Indian to render all possible help to the Samaj so that it may undertake the much needed enterprise. Even a mere man of business in this great industrial and commercial city of Bombay, will realize his own duty as well as interest from an economical point of view of this problem of elevation of the depressed who constitute no less than nearly one tenth of the whole population, and a considerably larger portion of the labouring population of this city. An intelligent if not a charitable glance at the following figures will reveal to him the piteous and pathetic state of circumstances which suffer such large number of human beings in the city to remain age after age in a condition materially so degraded and socially so disabled.

The City of Bombay

Mahars	40,647;	Mochis	12,622;	Chamars	5,950;
Dheds	6,149;	Mangs	2,499;	Bhangis	4,932;
Dhor	818;	Other low castes	9,397		

The total population of the city	9,82,000
The total number of the Depressed	83,014
The total number of pupils of the Depressed Classes attending schools in the city	—nearly 300
The total number of schools	4

कबीरा सोई पीर है, जो जाने पर पीर ।
जो पर पीर न जानई, सो काफिर वे पीर ।।

He alone is good, who understands the distress of others : he who does not understand the distress of others is void both of faith and goodness !

—*Kabir*

Appendix-B

V. R. Shinde

By Thakkar Bapa*

The late Mr. V. R. Shinde died recently after several years of continued paralytic attack. During the last fifteen years he was not in active life, being bed-ridden and so out of public gaze.

He was one of my four gurus and, next to my father, I took my lessons of public welfare work at his feet. Though younger in age to me, he was far advanced in the study of national beneficent activities. It is well-known that he was the father of the depressed classes welfare movement on Bombay-side, while he was the first man and a pioneer in such an activity, except in the Punjab and U.P. in recent times. I took my first lessons of practical work from him. After a lapse of 40 years, I have not forgotten the vivid description that he gave me of a Buddhist Bhikshu of Irish origin, and of his inimitable humility and piety, standing at his door, in the Bombay Prarthana Samaj building one early morning. When I was in Bombay Municipal service and in charge of the Kuchra unloading works, in about the years 1906 and 1907, with two or three hundred Mahars and Mangs doing the filthiest work, perhaps more insanitary than carrying night-soil by Bhangis, he gave me lessons in how to conduct schools for their children and to obtain as many privileges as I could for these humble low class workmen of the city of Bombay.

When a technical drafting error that was detected in the Bombay Municipal Act of 1888 prevented the corporation of Bombay from sanctioning the grant for a school I had started for its employees, he managed to get me the funds through some friendly Corporation member.

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* A great social reformer and Mahatma Gandhi's associate in the field of removal of untouchability Shri Thakkar Bapa, wrote this in *The Indian Social Reformer* dated April 8, 1944.

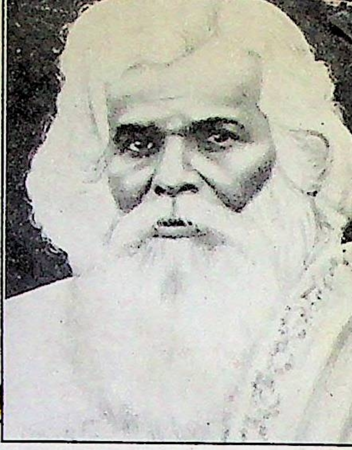
Years rolled by, and Sir N. G. Chandavarkar led a group of workers on the path of service to the Harijans, with Shinde as the working Secretary.

Neither the Government of India nor the subordinate Governments of the Provinces of these days were awakened to their sense of duty to the humblest and the suppressed. The Labour Department of Madras which has led the vanguard in this kind of public service and provided an object-lesson to other Provincial Governments, was not even then born. Thank God, it has flourished and spends about Rs. 10 to 12 lacs a year, which is not a very creditable percentage, even less than one per cent.

However, other Governments have not come up even to that stage yet, inspite of greatly added resources.

Temperamental differences divided the President and the Secretary of the Depressed Classes Mission after a long period, but Shinde continued to do his missionary task at four different places, Bombay, Poona, Dharwar and Nagpur, mostly in the Marathi area. I very well remember how he coaxed me to speak at a small meeting in a small state of Kathiawar in the year 1908 for the first time in my life. He encouraged me by complimenting me on the Gujarati speech I had then made. In the latter twenties of this century Shinde was out of action. Thereafter came the famous Gandhiji's movement and the whirlwind Harijan tour in 1933 and 1934 for 270 days continuously for the service of Harijans in the whole country and for the removal of untouchability from Hindu society. But that is another story.

He was an ill-paid missionary, but carrying on his mission all the same with unabated enthusiasm. He lived to the end in voluntary poverty with a small family. His widowed sister was also trained in this missionary work and she has survived him. He could ill-educate his sons, one of whom managed to maintain him in his declining years. The younger generation knows very little of Shinde. He was a man of far-sight with a lofty mission to do the long denied justice to five crores of our nation, about one-sixth of Indian humanity. In his time there was hardly any group of workers in the country for the social service activities, more so for our neglected and suppressed section. May his life be an inspiration to the new generation of field workers in the social service! May his soul rest in peace and be one with the Almighty who had endowed him with a noble mission and only 'but one spark' for the regeneration of not an inconsiderable part of our nation!



Maharshi Vitthal Ramji Shinde (1873-1944) was a great crusador against the evil of untouchability. First he came under the influence of M. G. Ranade and R. G. Bhandarkar and became a "Prarthana Samajist." Later the biography of Keshab Chandra Sen influenced him to become a Brahmo Samajist. He became the General Secretary of Indian Depressed Classes Mission when it was established in October 1906. He was also active in the All India Congress Committee and was the first man to move a resolution against untouchability.

Dr. G. M. Pawar (b. 1932) is a well-known critic and research scholar. He has undertaken extensive studies and research on the life and times of V. R. Shinde. Two of his monographs on V. R. Shinde have been published and he has edited four books apart from writing many articles. He retired as Professor and Head of the Dept. of Marathi, Shivaji University, Kolhapur.

Dr. Maya Pandit, the translator of this book, teaches English Literature and Linguistics in the Department of English in Shivaji University. She has translated some plays and poems from Marathi into English.

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एक सूत्रे सकलम्

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